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Inside Pages: In-Depth



An Analytic Compass

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What does it mean to consider the pioneering work of Carl Jung in his inspiration from things East of his native Switzerland? It means that we must read him for his interest in a natural expression of the creative quality of religion regardless of culture. This is a psychological and philosophical sense of what has brought help to the collective in broad ways and to personal intimacy with holy energies. Carl Jung and the East are somewhat familiar to us already. But the sense of it waits for more enquirers to engage the material. It waits for what we all wait for, a little feeling and imagination. This essay is a gesture toward the sense of that turn in direction; and East in that sense appreciates wholeness rather than pointing only to a setting or rising sun. The psychology of Jung is more than cultural but probably is not much more than reading material until a reader finds the personal interior, or an analytic compass. The inner life is the real East.

The *Collected Works (CW)*, Volume Eleven, is one of the places to begin a review. This includes reflection on *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, *The I-Ching*, *Yoga*, *Zen-Buddhism*, *Eastern Meditation*, and ideas of the Holy. For those familiar with the language of Analytic Psychology there is a correspondence between the theories of Synchronicity, Archetypes, Mandala, Consciousness (and the unconscious), Symbols, Myth, Transformation, and more with the wisdom of the East. These explore a quarternity (four directions) of essential knowledge where the East is not only external but is also understood in inner cartography. Jungian work is a poetic psychology plumbing the experiences of life outwardly and inwardly, through creative and personal intimacy. Exploring that can begin to open the heart to the exotic *other* that is both literal and internal.

Analytic Psychology began with the break from Freud in 1913, and this offered Jung a portal to the alchemical studies that allowed him to move in many directions flowering in his examination of religious practices and cultures. In regard to the East we know that as early as childhood Carl was inspired by a book his mother read to him. He says in the autobiography, *Memories, Dreams Reflections (MDR)*:

However, I remember a time when I could not yet read, but pestered my mother to read aloud to me out of the *Orbis Pictus*, an old, richly illustrated children's book, which contained an account of exotic religions, especially that of the Hindus. There were illustrations of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva which I found an inexhaustible

source of interest. My mother later told me that I always returned to these pictures. Whenever I did so, I had an obscure feeling of their affinity with my “original revelation”—which I never spoke of to anyone. (17)

That little boy, Carl, re-*turning* to those images and sense of wonder, is engaged with his imagination just as any feeling reader might be with powerful images. Here he is himself and not only a Protestant minister’s son whose mother was said to be difficult and also interested in what was called the occult. Jung’s inclusion of this in *MDR* is something of an innocent precursor of the scholarship that follows in maturity.

The *CW*, *vol. 11* is not just about the East but also about the West. This is literally true but it may help to remember that it is more about psychology than anything else. The volume is titled, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*. From it we sense what is called *religious attitude* as engaged by Carl Jung. This attitude is practically required in order to proceed into the work because of respect for soul that is opened, not the least of which is in one-self. Jung takes us toward his East by first writing about West where he reaches us in our present/his future, the past/his present, and reaches beyond time.

Yet it is unquestionably true that not only Buddha and Mohammed, Confucius and Zarathustra, represent religious phenomena, but also Mithras, Attis, Cybele, Mani, Hermes, and the deities of exotic cults. The psychologist, if he takes up a scientific attitude, has to disregard the claim of every creed to be unique and eternal truth. He must keep his eye on the human side of the religious problem, since he is concerned with the original religious experience quite apart from what the creeds have made of it. (9)

The word " phenomena" is used here carefully. It reveals another process to engage religion and religious experience that is grand scale and personal at the same time. The psychology of Jung includes a highly respected phenomenology around religious impulse. This makes sense from understanding his interest in history and culture along with religion and philosophy. The work of any psychology and psychologist is to begin an engaging dialogue with a patient/client (human being) toward containing, digesting, understanding, and healing (transforming) experience. If we, as the psycho-analyst and mystic W.R.Bion suggests, learn from experience, then we have an opportunity to engage more directly with the invisible forces of life. That experience is unique to each person but occurs in the context we all live in. With us is the sum expression of cultural and familial stories and symbols; and sometimes they just flat out don’t make sense. Pain, suffering, evil, confusion, abandonment, terrorism, empire, consumerism, and all the things we can add to a list of aches can become numbing. In the midst of that it may be increasingly difficult to locate something of God, the numinous. In turning toward the East, Jung takes us to an appreciation for psyche (soul) in life wherever life is found. His compass is one that requires East and West and the other directions too. The place to stand is the middle.

The Jungian analyst, Lionel Corbett, in his book, *The Religious Function of the Psyche*, writes about Jung’s work in the direction of consciousness:

The groundswell of fascination with Jungian and other psychologies of meaning testifies to the persistent presence of an intense spiritual search, motivated by the psyche’s intrinsic religious function but not bound by traditional church limitations. This work appeals to those psychotherapists who are themselves engaged in such a search, and who are unable to deny the power of the numinous experience by

defensively reducing it to some infantile equivalent such as a regressive merger with mother, or a return to the oceanic bliss of intrauterine paradise. Religious experience and questions of a religious nature are ubiquitous, not only culturally but especially in the course of any psychotherapeutic work that admits a transpersonal dimension. What needs emphasis is the fact that original responses to personal religious questions may arise in the course of contact with the transpersonal levels of the unconscious. (210-211)

So, it is something of a given that Carl Jung was moved by the wisdom of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and shamanism, along with the mystery of Judaism and Christianity. We must hold though that this is psychological. Just as Freud referred to his work as an archeology, so Jung is locating the threshold of something symbolic, psychological, and historical. I will leave it unnamed, but the intention is about something of a more direct experience of God. There is a phenomenon that Jung explores about the psyche and the essence of meaning. In the depths of depth psychology that is the stuff of transformation. By opening and learning from the East, there is not only mirroring but also reflection to the West.

Jung many times called himself a phenomenologist. He had a philosophical approach to consciousness that only matters if our deep thinking includes feeling and imagination in experience that says something about living with interiority. Yet we live in a time of technological paradox and are increasingly isolated and drawn toward fantasy. Life for the philosophically and psychologically inspired is challenged by a lack of meaning. I am speaking about a different use of imagination to recover soul by an active and phenomenological living that puts fantasy and dissociative disorder in its place and allows us to live inspired by the great philosophies. Our technological advances may have put us at odds with the sense of direct experience. The more I drive I-5, I wonder if it is possible for me to have an intuitive expression with less concern for the bad radio music and commercials, the other drivers, and cell phones? This conjures up neo-Kantian and Heideggerian thought along with Nietzsche and the thinkers on soul. Since this is a personal essay, I also want to acknowledge Kierkegaard and Beethoven. Let's not forget Goethe. This sort of romantic impulse toward the sacred, toward wholeness, toward deeper meaning is the feeling of wonder I get when I read and experience the dialogue of East and West. The call to feeling inner, invisible music is ever present when phenomenal aspects of religious experience hold importance.

This nod toward Western Philosophy is also a classification. That sort of thinking can be less satisfying but if there is more use of context and less reduction there can be creativity. If this were a fine wine we might call it an appellation. In the Jungian wine we have Goethe soil, vines from Medieval Alchemy, grapes from Nietzsche, pressing from Buddha, bottling from The Christ, and corking from mystery. Of course it is up to us to open the thing and pour a glass for ourselves and the guests. Otherwise, we do not *taste and see*.

The East summons me and I think, whoever they are, people living in the East do not think of themselves as "East," just as we don't typically say, "West." When did you last overhear anyone in the food court at the mall complain about the West? Change that to Starbucks. Just as in Christianity, there are myriad divergences in Buddhism, and wisdom in the East has not exactly produced a generative and ecstatic culture that is filled with higher vibrations. But it has the potential to do that just as our turn toward psychology has

its potential. Are there Chinese in Beijing in the new Starbucks debating the challenge to imagination in the West? Perhaps. But I guess they are talking more about the politics of energy, not about soul. Jung calls us to soul and for the reader it can be a call of questioning that incorporates the religious impulse with the philosophical mind.

The traditions in East and West resonate in difference and can illumine things for us. For example, Zen Master Joshu stories can sometimes help make the point. Here is one:

A monk asked, "What about it when I look neither in front nor behind?"

The master said, "Setting aside looking neither in front nor behind, who are you questioning?" (Chao-Chao Chan-Shih Yu-Lu, 39)

Joshu was/is a Rinzai Patriarch of Zen Buddhism and his psychology is revered in many Zen houses for wisdom to stop the mind in its dominance of the gut's immediate experience of knowing. Something else is evoked in the work that the thoughts cannot penetrate, yet the intuitive holds into the question and answer. The question of looking front and behind is not unlike the East/West. Who wants to know?

In thinking about the language of Jung it is impressive that he found corresponding meaning in several directions of the human and mysterious. These times, this techno intense time, hints that much waits to be uncovered in each of us just as advances in a mechanized world churn out new versions almost daily. It may hold that an encouraged appreciation of the East is especially satisfying when we remember Jung uncovered meaning for psychology that has become generative in other dialogues, for instance, physics.

Synchronicity was mentioned in the first paragraphs as an idea in Eastern religion that is also a core theory in Jungian work. We find it in the dialogue of Quantum Physics with Depth Psychology and it is a connecting principle. The effect of something that connects us in the manner of a syn-chron-istic experience is seeing with more than the five senses that there are forces larger than ourselves that we are part of. The *Eros* of this is found in Buddhism and Taoism as well as in neo-Platonic thinking and Renaissance discovery. But what does synchronicity mean? Daryl Sharp in *Jung Lexicon* writes:

Synchronicity was defined by Jung as an "acausal connecting principle," an essentially mysterious connection between the personal psyche and the material world, based on the fact that at bottom they are only different forms of energy. (133)

But let's read Jung directly from *CW 11*:

In other words whoever invented the *I Ching* was convinced that the hexagram worked out in a certain moment coincided with the latter in quality no less than in time. To him the hexagram was the exponent of the moment in which it was cast—even more so than the hours of the clock or the divisions of the calendar could be—inasmuch as the hexagram was understood to be an indicator of the essential situation prevailing at the moment of its origin.

This assumption involves a certain curious principle which I have termed synchronicity, a concept that formulates a point of view diametrically opposed to that of causality. Since the latter is merely a statistical truth and not absolute, it is a sort of working hypothesis of how events in space and time as meaning something more than mere chance, namely, a peculiar interdependence of objective events

among themselves as well as with subjective (psychic) states of the observer or observers. (592)

The emphasis here is not only on the wonder of relating but also upon the experience. That relationship to deeper, meaningful living is how I read the interest of Jung toward the East that is essentially beyond direction because it turns inward to the examined life. There the East is a joining energy that can work toward that aspect of the transpersonal that Corbett alluded to earlier, and tends the West, North, and South. The too outwardly focused runs toward an *outsider* perspective. Of course that too is quite the thing that Zen Master Joshu would delight in. Who is asking?

The systems of thought that fill psychological theory and religious dogmas can be bewildering. For instance, the Roman Catholic church and the Eastern Orthodox church still debate after about 1300 years whether or not the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father or the Father and the Son. Their split is indicative of our collective splits and projections and designations of East and West are also a kind of split. Bringing the directions into relationship offers something for healing, containing, and understanding.

Here is a reflection from Jung in *CW 11* that amply makes the point:

Through the withdrawal of projections, conscious knowledge slowly developed. Science, curiously enough, began with the discovery of astronomical laws, and hence with the withdrawal, so to speak, of the most distant projections. This was the first stage in the despiritualization of the world. One step followed another: already in antiquity the gods were withdrawn from mountains and rivers, from trees and animals. Modern science has subtilized its projections to an almost unrecognizable degree, but our ordinary life still swarms with them. You can find them spread out in the newspapers, in books, rumours, and ordinary social gossip. All gaps in our actual knowledge are still filled out with projections. We are still so sure we know what other people think or what their true character is. We are convinced that certain people have all the bad qualities we do not know in ourselves or that they practice all those vices which could, of course, be our own...If you imagine someone who is brave enough to withdraw all these projections, then you get an individual who is conscious of a pretty thick shadow... He has become a serious problem to himself, as he is now unable to say that *they* do this or that, they are wrong, and *they* must be fought against... Such a man knows that whatever is wrong in the world is in himself, and if he can only learn to deal with his own shadow he has done something real for the world... How can anyone see straight when he does not even see himself and the darkness he unconsciously carries with him into all his dealings? (p 83)

Carl Jung is engaged in a way of knowing that allows that we already know; and that fits more with many Eastern religious thinkers than the typical cognitive psychologist. That is not unlike Martin Heidegger who says we uncover knowing in ourselves and not unlike what many soulful thinkers, mystics, and poets have said through the ages. We cannot all become integrated theoretically to the many paths and traditions but we can learn to withdraw projections, uncover interiority, and live with more integrity. There is a hint of resonance for living with meaning in that in this poem from the poet, Kabir:

I talk to my inner lover, and I say, why such
rush?

We sense that there is some sort of spirit that loves
birds and animals and the ants—
perhaps the same one who gave a radiance to you in
your mother's womb.
Is it logical you would be walking around entirely
orphaned now?
The truth is you turned away yourself,
and decided to go into the dark alone.
Now you are tangled up in others, and have forgotten
what you once knew,
and that's why everything you do has some weird
failure in it.
(Bly, 23)

The turn I read in Jung is about containing that weird failure. East is a cover term for healing a split in psyche and allowing a life instinct to nurture us toward an experience called the numinous. That is the soul not bound tightly in projection, experiencing more fully the presence of God.

Religion is deeply a part of an older psychology that includes philosophy and an invitation to living in the process of becoming. The systems of the East, whether we call it Buddhism or Taoism or some other word, are religion in the sense that it is a way of life. That is to say it does not have to be a way of death.

In *CW 10* one chapter is titled, "What India Can Teach Us." Here is the last paragraph of that chapter:

If you want to learn the greatest lesson India can teach you, wrap yourself in the cloak of your moral superiority, go to the Black Pagoda of Konarak, sit down in the shadow of the mighty ruin that is still covered with the most amazing collection of obscenities, read Murray's cunning old *Handbook for India*, which tells you how to be properly shocked by this lamentable state of affairs, and how you should go into the temples in the evening, because in the lamplight they look if possible "more (and how beautifully) wicked"; and then analyze carefully and with the utmost honesty all your reactions, feelings, and thoughts. It will take you quite a while, but in the end, if you have done good work, you will have learned something about yourself, and about the white man in general, which you have probably never heard from any one else. I think, if you can afford it, a trip to India is on the whole most edifying and, from a psychological point of view, most advisable, although it may give you considerable headaches. (529-530)

Given the state of bombings and anger in our society and the world, we no longer have to travel anywhere for the headache. It is here.

Kabir was a 15th century poet in India who is claimed as a saint by both Hindus and Muslims. Evoking his spirit seems correct in an appreciation of the meeting of two cultures and traditions celebrated in one soul. Carl Jung is a poet of psyche and the unconscious because he uncovers poetic space in the transpersonal openings and more fully engages the center of our compass. He literally embodied that in his self-designed retreat, his tower at Bollingen, the upper lake of Zurich. In *MDR*, Jung shares:

I had in mind what I had seen in Indian houses, in which there is usually an area—though it may be only a corner of a room separated off by a curtain—to which the inhabitants can withdraw... In my retiring room I am by myself. I keep the key with me all the time; no one else is allowed in there except with my permission. In the course of the years I have done paintings on the walls, and

so have expressed all those things which have carried me out of time into seclusion, out of the present into timelessness. Thus the second tower became for me a place of spiritual concentration. (224)

Psychology can be a creative way to open to the wisdom in human experience and offer affection for religious experience. I don't know if it has worked well or not. Would we be better off if it was different? I find that hard to know and confusing and return to the core question of living in the question, opening the interior so that numbness doesn't fill the space of my heart. I think that is in line with Jung, Bion and the emerging psychoanalytic mystics who tend soul and in line with abiding interest in the ways of Lao Tzu, Kabbalah, and Jesus of Nazareth. We are collectively still somewhere East of Eden.

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