

# Jung and Yoga – Meeting of East and West

“No insight is gained by repressing and controlling the unconscious, and least of all by imitating methods which have grown up under totally different psychological conditions.... the West will produce its own Yoga.”<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this article is to invite you into the world of Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961, pictured across), and to provide you with hors d'oeuvres to begin to understand a plethora of Jungian theories. Part 1 will introduce you to the psyche, individuation and the Indian Chakra System. Part 2 will invite you to consider Jung's understanding of Yoga and his perceived differences between the psyches of the East and West.

## **INTRODUCTION – HOW THIS JOURNEY BEGAN**

My introduction to Jung was initiated through a course of study at the University of Lampeter, requiring me to review his paper ‘Yoga and the West’, originally published in India in 1936. The paper's overall message encouraged Western seekers of Yoga to understand, but not practise, Yoga because of differences existing between Eastern and Western psyches. I also wanted to know how his message applied to me. My ancestral heritage (through my parents) was Indian and Yogic, yet I was born and bred in

Birmingham, UK, so I held a fusion of both. Noticing my internal resistance to his inferred message, I knew it was important enough to pursue and not to immediately defer to my instinctual defensive reaction – a justified annoyance and believing he was wrong. Turning my arrogance into useful curiosity, I wanted to understand his reasons. In order to find this answer, I needed to understand his way of thinking i.e. his frame of reference. Little did I know how my life would change from that first Jungian encounter through a paper review. I am now coming to the end of my MA degree in Jungian Psychotherapy (Analytical Psychology) and Healing Practice, concluding with completing my dissertation focusing on challenging Kali's mis-representation as an archetype. I have also developed a new BWY Module on ‘Chakras and the Subtle Energy System’, starting in May. Both as student and course developer, I feel fortunate and blessed to have met Jung's world – by understanding Jung's wisdom in its context, its valuable contribution and application to many spheres in life (including Yoga) and, in hindsight probably the most important, to enable me to develop the ability to hold another (and at times a polar opposite) perspective without judgment. I would like to share this with you now.

## JUNG'S BACKGROUND

Jung, a Swiss and a Calvinist Protestant, was a committed seeker of knowledge, truth and understanding that stemmed from a challenging childhood whilst possessing a sensitive disposition. His yearning continued as a psychiatrist at Burgholzli Mental Hospital, and working with patients suffering from psychoses. He wanted to make sense of the mental suffering he observed and was expected to treat. His 7-year collaboration with Sigmund Freud led to a new role in psychotherapy and developing his primary concept of 'individuation'. His search continued into understanding the development of man's consciousness and spiritual evolution, and this led to ideas including: map of the psyche; the unconscious; persona; personality types; archetypes; complexes; importance of dream-work and analysis; introversion and extroversion; alchemy, anima/animus; synchronicity; alchemy; work with mandalas etc... All are written and contained within a 20 volume set known as the 'Collected Works of C.G.Jung'.

## JUNG'S KEY THEORIES OF COMPONENTS OF AN INDIVIDUAL THE PSYCHE

Gross<sup>2</sup> describes Jung's view that a person is already 'whole' from birth, with a personality in existence that is not acquired piece-meal through learned experiences. The aim is to 'maintain' this wholeness by preventing experiences of splitting and/or dissociation. Splitting occurs when an experience is pulled apart into 'good' and 'bad' – 'good' holding that part of experience associated with pleasure, and all that is judged as acceptable, and remains accessible as a memory retrievable from conscious awareness. 'Bad' holds that part of experience associated with pain, leading to avoidance, ignorance and being pushed down and out of conscious awareness and into the unconscious.

Jung defined the 'psyche' as the "totality of all psychic processes, conscious as well as unconscious"<sup>3</sup>

. The 'psyche' is also used to describe the soul and the whole personality (all thoughts, feelings and behaviours). Samuels et al<sup>4</sup> continues Jung's description of the psyche as "a structure made for movement, growth, change and transformation .... evolution towards self-realisation".

## CONSCIOUSNESS AND UNCONSCIOUS

Jung described the psyche as consisting of conscious and unconscious, collectively known as the 'self'. In order to maintain an experience of 'wholeness', reliable communication is needed between conscious and unconscious parts of the psyche. Conscious is the information, experiences, memories etc that one can access easily through awareness i.e. what one 'knows'. Gross<sup>5</sup> describes Jung's belief that consciousness (part of the mind 'known directly by the individual') operates in four ways through: thinking (understanding/cognition); feeling (pleasant-unpleasant); sensing (experiencing internal and external sensations produced by sense organs); intuiting ('perception via unconscious'). He also describes how the conscious mind is oriented via psychic energy (i.e. libido) either externally/outwards (extrovert) or internally/inwards (introvert).



The unconscious (a psychic, self governing and creative structure) contains all that has never been in consciousness and is therefore inaccessible. It consists of two parts, the personal and collective, often symbolized by water. The personal unconscious consists of memories, experiences, and information deemed unimportant or painful, that becomes repressed and placed out of conscious awareness. The collective unconscious is, citing Samuels et al<sup>6</sup>, "contents ..... that have never been in consciousness and reflect archetypal processes" and suggests that the unconscious communicates through images, symbols, metaphors and fantasies and seldom through direct words. Sanford<sup>7</sup> continues suggesting that for Jung, the unconscious reveals itself through "manifestations in dreams, visions, patterns of behaviour, affects, myths, fairy tales, and neuroses". It is here that archetypes reside and are found to exist in all cultures. These include the Great Mother, the Trickster, the Wise Man, the Hero etc...

The unconscious, not only houses what is repressed, it also holds the individual's great potential for growth, creativity and development.

## EGO AND SELF

The ego is defined as the centre of consciousness and 'viewer' of psychic functioning. Jung<sup>8</sup> describes it as "a complex of ideas which constitutes the centre of my field of consciousness and appears to possess a high degree of continuity and identity. Hence I also speak of an ego-complex". It is also involved in personal identity, care and maintenance of the personality, cognition and reality testing and in touch with a superior function, known as the Self. He stated the importance of ego as the 'the knower' of experience, as without this, any experience could not be known i.e. realised as happening. Coward<sup>9</sup> summaries that 'it is simply impossible to completely dispense with the knowing ego'. The Self (not self) is an archetypal image of a person manifesting their fullest potential and is a united, whole personality. It is never

reached as manifesting potential is an ever growing process.

## INDIVIDUATION

Individuation is the development of consciousness, movement from self (referring to ego or persona) towards the Self (which transcends the ego). The ego, emerging from this process, is viewed as 'the gatekeeper to consciousness'. It is the mediator between the conscious and unconscious, and provides the individual's important connection to their core, continuity and identity. In summary, the individuation process involves encouraging and observing more of the unconscious to come into conscious awareness, and recognising this is paced by the psyche and mediated by the ego.

## JUNG AND THE INDIAN CHAKRA SYSTEM

The Indian Chakra construct provided Jung with a working model that described the developmental phases of consciousness, (from the ordinary and mundane through to higher levels) and he interpreted its symbols in terms of the process of individuation. In 1932 Jung delivered his pivotal seminar on Kundalini yoga to the Psychological Club in Zurich. This was regarded as a major turning point in terms of the psychological understanding of Eastern philosophy, the use of symbols as communications from the unconscious, and of the symbolic transformations of inner experience. Through these lectures, he aimed to provide participants with comparisons and resonances between Indian thoughts of Kundalini Yoga and enlightenment with the Jungian process of individuation. The following is taken from Coward's<sup>10</sup> account of Jung's lectures.

## CHAKRAS AS SYMBOLS

Chakras are complicated multi-dimensional constructs which

are hard to grasp and explain through words and linear thinking alone. A more appropriate way to describe a chakra is through a symbol or image form, which can be interpreted from three perspectives: sthula – a literal meaning and personal connection based on the image; suksma – theoretical understanding, abstract and wisdom holding; para – at a level beyond mental functioning and sensory experience. Coward<sup>11</sup> offers that for Jung "the chakras are of great value to use in that they represent a real effort to give a symbolic theory of the psyche.... are valuable to modern Westerners, because it is an Eastern attempt to understand the psyche as a whole."

For Jung, each chakra is an individual whole world in its own right. This will now be explored

## Muladhara Chakra

For Jung, muladhara represents the routine world of conscious, daily life, where the ego (as centre of consciousness) is awake and functioning

whilst the self is asleep. In this chakra, a person is reactive to impulses, instincts, desires and the unconscious. It also connects a person to their biological roots and can experience powerless to exert any influence over entanglements of past history. Jung suggests that there may be rare moments, a faint tingling to have the urge to move to the next chakra, and this 'passion' is denoted by the Chakra's red colour. This might take the form of wanting to visit a church, reconnect with nature, to be in a wider space surrounded by mountains. For Jung, this movement to the next Chakra, could be understood as routine ego-consciousness now connecting to the faint glimmers of the unconscious.

## Svadhithana Chakra

Jung purposely suggests that the self is asleep in muladhara, and infers an unaware 'ego-consciousness' that exists by reacting to impulses and external forces. The lighter vermillion colour denotes the beginnings of self-awareness, a movement into Svadhithana. Instead of moving upwards as described in the Indian model, Jung suggests that movement is downwards and into the unconscious, as the process of individuation and self-discovery begins. This process is seen as akin to baptism in hope of a re-birth. This movement manifests itself through dreams, particularly concerning water, which is not only the element of Svadhithana but also the unconscious. As a new consciousness unfolds, so does a growing sense of eternity as there is a separation from the mundane world of ego-consciousness. Identifying solely with this awareness can lead to neurotic inflation and a difficulty living a 'down to earth' life. He relates the Kundalini as 'the sleeping serpent of the unconscious', and care must be taken when working with these psychic forces



that have laid dormant until the serpent becomes aroused. He stressed the need for guidance (through therapy or with a Guru) as this individuation process begins.

### Manipura Chakra

Jung regards the fire element of manipura to be a person's true self, and no longer bound to time and space and instead seems immortal. Fire represents the divine and inner passions; using the baptism metaphor, with emotions emerging, fire represents hell and temptation. He stresses that only by facing one's own flames of desire (and not splitting them into the unconscious or projecting them out into the world) can movement be made to reach the next level of consciousness.

### Anahata Chakra

Moving from the passions located within the depths of the belly and into the heart and lungs of anahata, Jung suggests this is a lifting out from the desires of earthly experience. It is a great leap from fire to air, one very few people manage. It represents no longer identifying with earthly desires. Instead it is moving into a space of impersonal experience, where one can observe emotions without the need to act them out or repress them, and quoting Jung, 'in anahata individuation begins'.

For the next three Chakras, Jung was very clear that his interpretations were simply made at a theoretical level only.

### Visuddhi chakra

It is here that purification of relating to worldly challenges and obstacles begins. Citing Coward<sup>12</sup> "the bond that exists between external objects and internal thoughts and feelings is dissolved". The eternal world is viewed as a reflection of the psyche.

### Ajna Chakra

For Jung, only a divine reality sits within Ajna, a psychic reality and nothing of ordinary physical experience. The self returns to a state of divinity within itself.

### Sahasrara Chakra

Jung suggests that at this stage, the meaning of Sahasrara from an Indian philosophical perspective does not hold a parallel within Jungian theory.

### CONCLUSION - SO FAR

At this point, let's take a rest stop to digest the psychic morsels presented so far. Jung believed in the greatness of man's potentiality (his Self) and this gave rise to a new theoretical understanding known as Analytical Psychology. He respected both physicality and spirituality and as Harris<sup>13</sup> suggests "Jung speaks of a place where the opposite poles of spirit and matter both meet and don't meet.... the subtle body, the intermediate place between spirit and body". It was through this acknowledgment of this subtle body that enabled him to draw parallels to many systems within Eastern philosophies, especially with the Indian Chakra system. Yet, he was also aware of the differences that also existed, particularly within his views regarding Yoga and its practice in the West. This will be discussed in Part 2.

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### ENDNOTES

- 1 Jung CG CW XI 1969
- 2 Gross (1996, p.921)
- 3 Jung (CW 6, para.797)
- 4 Samuels et al (1986, p.115)
- 5 Gross (1996, p.921)
- 6 Samuels (1986, p.155)
- 7 Sanford (1978, p.15)
- 8 Jung (1921, p. 425)
- 9 Coward (1985 p.70)
- 10 Coward (1985 p.114)
- 11 Coward (1985 p.114)
- 12 Coward (1985 p.121)
- 13 Harris p.20