Chapter VIII

JUNG'S CONCEPT OF SELF

I

The first sentence of Jung's autobiography is, "My life is a story of the self-realization of the unconscious". This sets the tone of his metapsychology. He spoke of life as a succession of psychic metamorphoses. His own life was no exception in that regard. According to his autobiography, in the month of December 1913, Jung launched himself into a solitary and perilous voyage through the unconscious like the Nekyia of Ulysses, his journey to the Sojourn of the Dead, as depicted in Homer's Odyssey. Jung resorted to the method of active imagination. He caught hold of a dream image or a spontaneous visual image, suspended his critical faculties and noted with absolute objectivity the series of transformation of the image. By thus provoking the upsurge of unconscious imagery and its overflowing into consciousness Jung achieved his descent into Hades, the subterranean world. Archetypes began to manifest themselves. He was overwhelmed, but he remained firmly anchored in reality. He heard voices. Supernormal phenomena began to recur. "Gradually", writes Ellenberger, "Jung had the impression that he was emerging from a long night, and he made another notable discovery: the

process in which he had been engaged had an aim; it led the individual to the discovery of the most intimate elements of his personality, the self. At the beginning of 1919 Jung terminated his experiment, from which he emerged as a new man with a new teaching. 2

Jung's concept of the self is not a speculative concept of the philosophers but a verity of experience. In this respect he belongs to the class of seers of the world who emphatically declare that the self is the final truth which can be realized in this very life.

According to Jung, the human psyche has a tendency to develop in the direction of a stable unity. This spontaneous development is an unfolding of original undifferentiated wholeness latent in the psyche. From the emergence of the ego out of the collective unconscious to the ultimate realization of the self continues the life-long process of psychic unfolding. In order to realize the wholeness various systems of the psyche must be fully differentiated and developed. The process of achieving this differentiation is called individuation. 3

Jung observes, "Individuation means becoming a single, homogeneous being, and, in so far as "individuality" embraces

our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self. "Such individuality can develop only if a man is conscious of all unconscious contents. The assimilation of these contents of the unconscious, personal and collective is the way to complete integration.

Jung says that the persona is a hindrance to the development of full individuality. It is always identical with a typical attitude dominated by a single psychological function. As a consequence, its exclusive character causes the relative repression of other functions. The dissolution of the persona is therefore absolutely necessary for the process of individuation. With this dissolution the collective unconscious begins to be experienced. Archetypal images begin to appear in dreams, visions and phantasies.

The first stage of the individuation process is the encounter with the shadow. The shadow represents the undifferentiated and undeveloped function and attitude. So its experience often leads the individual to realize the limitations of his ego-personality. The confrontation with the shadow is a frightening experience. The individual seeks to escape it by projecting his own dark features upon others. The task, says Jung, is to admit the negated side instead of dismissing it. The inferior personality has to be developed. As Hans Jacobs observes, "In order to widen and deepen the

horizon of consciousness one has first to acknowledge oneself as what one is instead of what one ought to be. To build up an harmonious whole, the under-emphasized, rejected or even unknown elements may become as important as those which are acknowledged. Creation generally takes place in the midst of darkness. 

As noted earlier, the shadow has two aspects - it includes much of the personal unconscious, but has also a collective archetypal aspect. The shadow thus stands on the threshold of the realm of the primordial unconscious. It bars the way to the creative depths of the psyche. By assimilating the shadow without falling into its grip, the individual descends into the wider world of the collective unconscious. As Jung observes, "The shadow is a tight passage, a narrow door whose painful constriction no one is spared who goes down to the deep well ... what comes after the door is, surprisingly enough, a boundless expanse full of unprecedented uncertainty, with apparently no inside and no outside, no above and no below, no here and no there, no mine and no thine, no good and no bad. It is the world of water, where all life floats in suspension; where the realm of the sympathetic system, the soul of everything living, begins; where I am indivisibly this and that; where I experience the other in myself and the other-than-myself experiences me." 

The second stage of individuation is the experience of the soul-image, the anima or the animus. The archetypal
The confrontation with the anima, Jung says, is a test of courage, an ordeal for the moral forces of the individual. The anima falsifies and intensifies all his emotional relations with his work and with other people of both sexes. All entanglements are her doing. Like a siren or a mermaid or a nymph she comes upon us and changes into all sorts of shapes like a witch. "She is a mischievous being who crosses our path in numerous transformations and disguises, playing all kinds of tricks on us, causing happy and unhappy delusions, depressions and ecstasies ... Even in a state of reasonable introjection the nixie has not laid aside her roguery. The witch has not ceased to mix her vile potions of love and death; her magic poison has been refined into intrigue and self-deception, unseen though none the less

8. ibid., p. 671
dangerous for that.°

The anima's influence can be either beneficial or detrimental. The problem of the individual is to establish the appropriate relationship with her. She can become a source of wisdom, creativity and inspiration for him. The anima often represents the mixture of the undifferentiated functions, sometimes it is the embodiment of the inferior function. A transformation and a renewal of inner energies is, according to Jung, the gain of facing the anima and understanding her and the functions corresponding to her. Instead of being frightened by the uncanniness of the anima figures one should see creative force in them. But if the individual fails to face the hard task, the encounter with the anima may be a misadventure, leading to psychoses in which he is swallowed up by his visions. Instead of receiving benefit from the anima, he is possessed by it. What is true of the anima is true of the animus as well. The inner masculine side has not only a daemonic power but "is also a creative and procreative being." ¹⁰ Jacobi aptly observes, "Thus there is a natural complementarity between the sexes, not only on the physical level where it gives birth to the 'bodily child', but also in the mysterious stream of images which flows through the depths of their souls and joins them together to engender the 'spiritual child'." ¹¹

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As the conscious assimilation of the shadow means conquest of the evil and dark side of the psyche, a successful realization of the soul-image takes the individual beyond the magic power of sex. He is no longer carried away, he achieves "a real independence and with it, to be sure, a certain isolation." Once the contrasexual aspect of the psyche is recognized and revealed, it cannot operate from the unconscious. This results in extraordinary enrichment of consciousness. The anima and the animus forfeit the daemonic power of autonomous complexes. They are depotentiated.

When the perils of sex are overcome, new archetypal figures arise. They are the archetype of 'the wise old man' representing the spiritual principle and the archetype of 'the magna mater' representing the great earth mother. For a long time Jung thought that the archetype of the spirit was characteristic of masculine individuation process while its counterpart in the woman's individuation process was the archetype of the great mother. But later he discovered that both the archetypes are encountered by men and women. Both figures, the wise old man and the great mother, appear in many forms. They appear as magician, prophet, helmsmen of the dead and as goddess, priestess etc. They often lure the individual into a kind of self-glorification and megalomania. So it is the task of the individual to free himself from the danger of an identification with their image.

12. ibid., p. 123

Jung calls these figures mana personalities because of their occult and bewitching qualities. The Melanesian term 'mana' means an all pervading supersensuous power that operates in unexpected ways or appears in natural objects of striking character. It is not fixed in any object but disembodied spirits and supernatural beings possess this magical power and can impart it.

For Jung, this supernatural power belongs to the collective unconscious. When the mana-personalities rise out of the unconscious, they threaten to possess the conscious personality and create a psychic danger. The anima and the animus as archetypes of the unconscious have some mana, but by dissolving them the individual cannot assimilate their mana into his or her consciousness. The figures of the old wise man and the great mother attract the mana. The identification with these figures of the collective unconscious produces an extension of the personality leading to the state of inflation.

A characteristic feature of the collective images is, according to Jung, their "cosmic" element. They have enormous speed, spatio-temporal infinity, astrological associations and other cosmic qualities. All this is due to the cosmic dimension of the collective unconscious which is continuous with the general unconscious of the universe. It is evident that

15. Jung, C.W. Vol. 8, p. 63
if the individual descends into this cosmic unconscious, his consciousness will be cosmically inflated. Jung observes, "If it were possible to personify the unconscious, we might think of it as a collective human being combining the characteristics of both sexes, transcending youth and age, birth and death, and from having at its command a human experience of one or two million years, practically immortal. If such a being existed, it would be exalted above all temporal change ... it would be a dreamer of age-old dreams and, owing to its limitless experience, an incomparable prognosticator." 17

According to Jung, the psychic inflation resulting from identification with the mana-personalities must be transcended. Any fixation in this stage of individuation often leads to madness, for "whoever identifies with the collective psyche ... and vanishes in it, is near to the treasure that the dragon guards, but he is there by extreme constraint and to his own greatest harm." 18 Everyone succumbs to the temporary identification in course of the deep individuation process. But he must learn in all humility to distinguish himself from these collective forces. The mana-personalities can take possession of the ego because the ego dreams of victory over the anima or the animus. It is a question of might against might. The ego wants to conquer the unconscious; the unconscious reacts with a tremendous attack by

17. Jung, C.W. Vol. 8, pp. 349-350
raising the figure of the mana-personality. Jung says that the only defence against this is full confession of one's weakness before the powers of the unconscious, for "if the ego drops its claim to victory, possession by the magician ceases automatically." 19 If the individual can differentiate the ego from the archetype of the mana-personality, he can, while realizing the subjective limits of the ego, experience the inexhaustible wealth of the inner world existing beyond.

With the dissolution of the mana-personality through conscious assimilation of its contents, the individual is not far from the goal. He is led by the unconscious, as it were, to a new centre of the personality, a mid-point common to both consciousness and the unconscious. It is the last stage on the path of individuation. When differentiation is achieved through the operation of the individuation process, differentiated systems are then integrated by the transcendent function. Jung compares this psychological function to "a mathematical function of the same name which is a function of real and imaginary numbers." 20 The tendencies of the conscious and the unconscious together make up the transcendent function. "It is called "transcendent" because it makes the transition from one attitude to another organically possible, without loss of the unconscious." 21 This function is endowed with the capacity to unite all the opposing trends of the

19. ibid., p. 227
20. Jung, C.W. Vol. 8, p. 69
21. ibid., p. 73
psychic systems. Its aim is the realization of the original wholeness. It brings about integration of the conscious and the unconscious.

This highest stage of individuation is often manifested to consciousness by the emergence of the archetypal image of the self. These images are called unifying symbols because they represent transformation of the opposites into a higher synthesis. They are the primordial images of psychic totality. They are the mandalas or magic circles. Mandalas are the oldest religious symbols of mankind and are found in different cultures. In India and Tibet they have been used from time immemorial as yantras or instruments of meditation.

Mandala is a circular figure divided into four sections and ornamented with symbols. There are innumerable variants of the mandala but all are based on the squaring of a circle. "Their basic motif", observes Jung, "is the premonition of a centre of personality, a kind of central point within the psyche, to which everything is related, by which everything is arranged, and which is itself a source of energy. The energy of the central point is manifested in the almost irresistible compulsion and urge to become what one is ... This centre is not felt or thought of as the ego but, if one may so express it, as the self." 22

Jung says that self-realization is a difficult task. A few rare souls dare to proceed towards it. Gods and goddesses are left behind. With mandala-experience one gets the feeling of attaining a full-orbed self. However, it will be a mistake to think that all mandalas are pictures of highest individuation. As psychological phenomena they can appear at any stage of the individuation process. As a rule they occur in conditions of psychic dissociation or disorientation, indicating "an attempt at self-healing on the part of nature, which does not spring from conscious reflection but from an instinctive impulse." Thus spontaneous emergence of the mandala symbolisms from the depths of the psyche can lead to a solution of many psychic conflicts. But self-realization through conscious assimilation of the mandala is, in the words of Jacobi, "an extremely difficult task, which can be successfully performed only by the fortunate few, those elected and favoured by grace."24

II

The most salient feature of Jung's conception of the self is the emphasis he places upon the process of individuation. The human being enters life with a non-differentiated unconscious. He then slowly emerges as a conscious ego,

23. ibid., p. 388

separated from the dark background. He moves from the original unconscious anonymity to a false anonymity when he is lost in the persona, the representative of the mass. By way of individuation he frees himself from the persona and moves toward a new integration of planes, a new synthesis where conscious and unconscious are harmonized into a new personality, to which Jung gives the name self. It must not be thought that according to Jung the self is created and the new wholeness manufactured. As Hall and Nordby observe, "Man does not strive for wholeness; he already has it, he is born with it. What he must do throughout his life span, Jung says, is to develop this inherent wholeness to the greatest degree of differentiation, coherence and harmony possible, and to guard against it breaking up into separate autonomous and conflicting systems." 25

Jung shows high regard for the unconscious psyche, because it contains contents which would mean an immeasurable increase of knowledge if they could be made conscious. But he stresses that the opening of the unconscious involves intense spiritual suffering. The risk of being swamped by the forces of the underworld is very real. Yet they must be faced if wholeness is to be realized. Jung's view will be supported by all the mystics of the world. The awakening of the self is always balanced by some sort of mental chaos. As Underhill

describes it, "Sooner or later, however, psychic fatigue sets in; the state of illumination begins to break up, the complementary negative consciousness appears, and shows itself as an overwhelming sense of darkness and deprivation. This sense is so deep and strong that it inhibits all consciousness of the transcendent; and plunges the self into the state of negation and misery which is called the 'Dark Night.'"  

The process of individuation is really a process by which the ego becomes more and more aware of its relationship to the non-ego, the collective psyche. With the expanding consciousness, the self can assume more and more of its function as the centre of the total psyche. This realization leads Jung to maintain that the individuation is a religious process. The uniting symbol as the carrier of the most powerful energy corresponds to the realization of God in religion. As Jung observes, "The mandala, though only a symbol of the self as the psychic totality, is at the same time a God-image, for the central point, circle, and quaternity are well-known symbols for the deity."  

For Jung the experience of the God-image is identical with the archetypal experience of the self. It is an experience of the supra-individual centre of existence, of

a power that gives and takes life. It is not made by the individual but happens to him out of the depths of the psyche. Jung says that every experience of the Deity, whatever be the way in which it is formulated in different religions, represents the experience of the self as the union of the opposites - the coincidentia oppositorum. The fact of the existence of an archetype of Deity in the psyche leads Jung to the view that religion is a natural function of the human mind. Regarded from the psychological standpoint, the self can be formulated as "the God within us".

According to Rudolf Otto, the essential religious experience is 'numinous'. He coined this new term to describe the specific experience of the Holy. A numinous state of mind is sui generis and irreducible to any other. The essential feature in it is the creature-feeling, the feeling of self-abasement into nothingness before an overpowering, absolute might of some kind. The presence of the Creator is experienced as a "mysterium tremendum", that is, with a feeling of awe and shuddering before an unapproachable Being. But it is simultaneously experienced as a "fascinans", that is, as something that attracts and fills with blissful exaltation.

28. A coincidentia oppositorum is expressed in all symbols, but its highest expression is in the mandalas. Jung has described the presence of the uniting symbol in various forms of religious experience in "Mysterium Conjunctionis", C.W. Vol. 14.


Jung takes over the term numinous but extends its application. For Otto, the prophets and mystics have this exceptional experience. Jung ascribes a numinous quality to the experiences of the archetypes and demonstrates the universality of mystic life processes. He shows that there is no mystery in mysticism. It is as open and empirical as any scientific experience. It is a natural process of psychic development.

Otto's numen is the "wholly other" which falls quite outside the sphere of the usual. As he says, "The truly 'mysterious' object is beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently 'wholly other', whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own, and before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb." The mystery of the transcendent otherness, however, remains unexplained. Why is the numinous felt as the 'wholly other'? It is Jung, we think, who gives a satisfactory answer to the question. The ego grows out of the collective unconscious which is called the non-ego. While the ego has all the characteristics of transitoriness, the non-ego has the quality of eternity. For this reason the non-ego appears through the archetypal images as having numinous character.

31. ibid., p. 28
Jung shows that religion is rooted in the unconscious, elemental level in us. Religious symbols spring forth from this primordial part of the psyche. This does not mean that they are primitive. On the contrary, they are timeless, pregnant with eternal truth. The Jungian view is shocking to some theologians, because they feel that Jung treats religious experiences which are transcendental in character as mere psychic processes. But these critics, we may point out, fail to see that the 'psyche' for Jung is not something known, not a passing bubble on the surface of the ocean but is identical with the ocean having the densest darkness it is possible to imagine. Jung observes, "We do not devalue statements that originally were intended to be metaphysical when we demonstrate their psychic nature; on the contrary, we confirm their factual character. But, by treating them as psychic phenomena, we remove them from the inaccessible realm of metaphysics, about which nothing verifiable can be said and this disposes of the impossible question as to whether they are "true" or not. We take our stand simply and solely on the facts."33

In this context we may refer to William James with whom Jung has most in common. According to James, the subconscious reveals to us an unsuspected peculiarity in the constitution of the human mind. The conscious mind is continuous with

a wider self through which religious experiences come. As James says, "... whatever it may be on its farther side, the "more" with which in religious experience we feel ourselves connected is on its hither side the subconscious continuation of our conscious life ... it is one of the peculiarities of invasions from the subconscious region to take on objective appearances, and to suggest to the Subject an external control."34

This "More" is God. James did not deny the objective existence of the "More". For him, it has, "on its farther side", wider cosmic relations which extend beyond the abysmal deeps of man's own soul. It is operative in the universe outside of man and is the guarantee of an ideal order. He admitted that in expressing such conviction he went beyond the bounds of Science. James described his own "over-belief" in the following words, "... just as our primary wide-awake consciousness throws open our senses to the touch of things material, so it is logically conceivable that if there be higher spiritual agencies that can directly touch us, the psychological condition of their doing so might be our possession of a subconscious region which alone should yield access to them. The hubbub of the waking life might close a door which in the dreamy Subliminal might remain ajar or open."35

Jung may appear to be more cautious than James. As an empirical psychologist he is concerned with the phenomenology

35. ibid., p. 237
of religious experience as an expression of inner psychic processes. He is not concerned with the existence or non-existence of God. Strictly speaking, he refers to God-archetype and not to God. He contents himself with the psychic reality of an archetypal experience which is understood to be and formulated as God. He does not go into the question of the absolute reality behind it. But this does not imply scepticism to higher powers. As Jacobi says, "For in the mirror of the human psyche we can glimpse the absolute only as it is refracted by our limited human nature; we cannot know its true essence. This faculty is immanent in the psyche; but the psyche can never do more than clothe its intimation of the absolute in a perceptible image."36

One of Jung's inestimable services to contemporary philosophy is his fearless and continued insistence on the mystical horizons of human personality. He finds in the psyche a universe which has unfathomable depths and lives according to its laws. Our conscious mind, the ego, has to be brought into communication with our roots in this cosmic dimension of existence. This is the goal of the process of individuation. The wholeness is latent in every man. It awaits realization.

As soon as any degree of ego-consciousness develops, we are no longer contained in the wholeness of life. To become conscious means to discriminate, and discrimination means

separation. The polarity between the conscious mind and the unconscious matrix develops into conflict. The original sin is separation from the unconscious unity. As Jung says, "The biblical fall of man presents the dawn of consciousness as a curse."\(^{37}\) But we cannot escape our fate by casting off the yoke of consciousness. To become conscious is the prerogative of man. In the process of reflection he comes out of the blind circle of nature. The salvation lies neither in one-sided development of ego-consciousness nor in mere absorption into the dark unconscious. Albert Jung eruditely observes, "Redemption lies, not in seeing the ego as guilt, as original sin, but in realizing that the climax of becoming fully human lies in the self-sacrifice of the differentiated ego. Then an ego that has become conscious of itself does not become petrified in its hybris, but self-sacrifice passes over into the transcendence, into the new dimension of the self, embracing the opposites in all their tension and transforming hostile separation into polar opposition."\(^{38}\)

We may observe here that the stage of transcendence Albert Jung speaks of is only a step toward further progress in the process of individuation. Reconciliation of opposites presupposes their functional equivalence. Once this is achieved, oppositions are transcended. C. G. Jung suggests this highest stage of transcendence when he speaks of "the nirdvandva of Hindu philosophy, the freedom from opposites, which is

\(^{37}\) Jung, C.W. Vol. 8, p. 388

shown as a possible way of solving the conflict through reconciliation. Consideration of this highest transcendence forms the next chapter of our enquiry.