



On Attaining Wholeness

The concept of wholeness is so very great, so demanding of our uttermost powers of understanding, that most of us must be content to glimpse it, indirectly, so to speak, through art of some kind, and literary art as often as not. It is a benign concept, though many terrors are in the path of those who seek it. (p. 269)

I suggested that the process was painful, and indeed it frequently is so. But it is something else—something that Freud never mentioned, because of his preoccupation with neurosis, but which Jung suggests: It is sometimes joyous, victorious, and beautiful. It is not fashionable nowadays to say that one's life has moments of piercing beauty, or that it brings hours which are not merely recompense, but ample and bounteous reward for all the anxieties and dark moments. But I am not a fashionable person, and I am saying that now. (p. 133)

Robertson Davies

One Half of Robertson Davies



Jung And I:

A Study in Personal Integration

Barbara McLean

Barbara McLean is a Mensa member. A graduate of University of California, Riverside, she has worked for 15 years as a paralegal and legal office manager. She is currently associate writer/editor for a major astronautics company.

ABSTRACT: *Integration may be the central issue for a gifted American female over age 30. Mid-life crisis seems universal in our culture, and if Dabrowski is correct, it can strike the gifted hard. A female is particularly torn between the demands, needs, and expectations of others and her own need for individuation, and American culture offers little support or encouragement. But we are discovering that individuation—personal integration—is the only foundation for integration with loved ones and society. My own struggle has been enhanced by Jungian thought in my reading, and I was fortunate to find a Jungian therapist to assist me. The struggle has seldom been painless, but it has always been fascinating.*

I would like to make it clear that I am not a Jungian scholar. But most of my favorite reading is well-founded in Jungian thought, and when I discovered I was not navigating mid-life crisis with my usual confidence and faith, I was fortunate to find a gifted Jungian psychologist with whom to work. The growing I have done in the last few years, therefore, has been Jungian in flavor.

Jung's concepts of integration and individuation were central to the issues I brought to therapy. I sought therapy because I had lost faith in myself. I had done things on my own and in my own way for a long time and encountered life-threatening consequences. So I then had capitulated to outside values, assuming they might have a validity I had not perceived, and again I encountered life-threatening consequences. Jungian ideas offered a way out of this dilemma.

The central issue for me was the individuation process, which involves integrating parts of the self heretofore banished to the unconscious: the *persona*, projections, the *shadow*, and the *animus/anima*. Therapeutic methods include dream analysis and active imagination. The goal is a feeling of completion, integration, achievement of a whole self. Jung called this process "the great psychotherapy," depicting it as "a difficult task in which two total personalities (doctor and patient) cooperate; to experience and work with the unconscious involves not only the expenditure of enormous effort, but above all, courage" (Hochheimer, 1969, p. 129).

Why should this be so? June Singer (1972), analyst and expositor of Jungian theory, states:

The individuation process, in the Jungian sense, means the conscious realization and integration of all the possibilities imminent in the individual. It is opposed to any kind of conformity with the collective, and... it also demands the rejection of those prefabricated psychic matrices—the conventional attitudes—with which most people would like to live. It offers the possibility that everyone can have his own direction, his special purpose, and it can attach a sense of value to the lives of those who suffer from the feeling that they are unable to measure up to collective norms and collective ideals. (p.140)

The individuation process includes a dissociation from the social norm and the ensuing fear of rejection. This can be a lonely position indeed. My own journey did lead to a feeling of isolation and abandonment, but the rewards of the integration process have more than compensated for the pain.

Jung's concept of integration includes bringing to consciousness matters that heretofore have been governed by the unconscious. "A 'complete' human being results from the close union of conscious and unconscious: he must have experienced and 'suffered' the contents of the unconscious before he can separate himself from them..." (Hochheimer, 1969, p. 127).

So what are the roadmakers of the path? Let's look at some of these parts of ourselves that need to be recognized.

The Persona

The persona is a person's social mask, the facade we turn toward the world in our efforts to get along with it. Jung indicates that in the process of persona construction, we can come to identify with it and believe that is who we are. I could say that what drove me to therapy was struggle over the persona. I had had much support from teachers over the years to present myself truly to the world, but the older I became, the less acceptable my true self seemed to be. I had been attempting to build a more acceptable persona, one that could more easily accept the random abuses of daily life, but in the process I was losing myself. I had misplaced who I truly was and doubted my worth. Through therapy I was able to disengage enough from my persona to evaluate it more thoroughly. I developed a renewed sense of self that felt validated and true.

Projections

Projections occur when we identify unrecognized parts of ourselves in others. The stronger and more inappropriate the persona is for us, and the more

we have identified ourselves with it, the more we will project the hidden parts of ourselves onto others and try to resolve our internal conflicts in these external relationships. I discovered a group of my projections when my therapist asked me to describe my heroes. As Sheldon Kopp (1972) says, "If you have a hero, look again; you have diminished yourself in some way" (p. 223). All the people I had admired over the years shared the quality of "presence." They were supremely noticeable when they entered a room—people like Katharine Hepburn. My therapist asked me if I had ever felt I had lost presence. I told him that I never remembered having it, but my mother told me that I had it as a small child. He smiled. It was interesting that, although we never directly addressed that subject again, I found I was regaining somewhat a feeling of presence—and the intensity of my hero worship diminished.

Another use we make of projections is to place on another person responsibility that we must more rightfully take on ourselves. A dream assisted me in resolving one such projection. In the dream a group of people was verbally attacking me. My mother was present, but instead of defending me, she threw a bundle to me. When I caught it, I saw that the bundle was a baby. As soon as I held the infant, the crowd disappeared. After waking, I realized that the baby in the dream was an infant image of myself and that instead of looking to my mother or anyone else for protection, I must learn to protect myself.

The Shadow

Part of our difficulty in coming to terms with our persona and the cause of our projections onto others is our fear of our own shadow, the darker side of our personalities, which we delete from the persona and find difficulty acknowledging in our inner selves. Jungian thought is quite clear that acceptance of and integration with this dark part of ourselves is the healthiest, most powerful, and, in fact, most moral choice we can make. Banishing it, denying it, does not eradicate it but gives it hidden power.

The quality of my shadow with which I struggled most in therapy was anger. I had been reared, as many women have, under the injunction that anger is the first deadly sin, and for women the worst deadly sin. Even though I had fought against these teachings quite angrily as I was growing up, I still believed them. Anger had been used destructively against me, and I felt it would be more destructive for me to become destructive than to accept anger from others. My therapist assisted me in discovering nondestructive but effective uses of anger. I found that hiding my anger, even from myself, was an effort to protect myself and my loved ones, which actually diminished the potential of the relationships. Later, as I came to accept this shadow energy, I found that anger can even be a sign of love.

Anima/Animus

Another way we reduce ourselves is through the nondevelopment of opposite sex energy, which emerges into the consciousness as the anima for men, the animus for women — images of femaleness and maleness as “the other,” the foreign mystery. Powerful social forces shape our concepts of our role as male or female, and courage is again required to accept and incorporate into ourselves this strange and often taboo energy. The hidden animus or anima is a universal archetype that can have powerful implications in our relationships. We often seek in our partners qualities of our anima or animus so that we may join with it. When our partners do not sufficiently fit the image, we can have difficulty adapting.

Over the course of my therapy, my animus actually changed. Originally my animus had many of the qualities of my hero image, which I perceived as quite different from myself. After some time in therapy, I began an exciting and seemingly stable new relationship with someone, it seemed, very like me. I was surprised to find that my animus image had developed qualities like my own. After that relationship ended, I had a dream. I was returning from a date. My date and I kissed goodnight on the porch, and I went inside, feeling marvelous. My date had been the male version of me, my animus. The day after the dream, I felt unusually happy. When I told my therapist of my dream, he said that any dream in which one encounters one’s animus/anima, particularly in an image of embrace, is very powerful. I don’t know the psychological terms in which to express it, but it made me feel quite resolved.

Active imagination, as well as dreams, can be a therapeutic tool. This skill, which can be learned,

... is not the same as fantasy. Jung has called this use of the imagination by the term active imagination to distinguish it from the ordinary passive imagination, which is nothing more than self-propelling fantasy. Active imagination is entered into consciously, in an effort to engage the unconscious in dialogue with the ego. (Singer, 1972, p. 337)

I had been trying to work out a 30-year-old problem with my uncle, who had passed away a few years before. None of my fantasies of talking with him worked for me. He always seemed like a grown-up saying comforting things to a child — and, as any child knows, grown-ups seldom tell the truth when they’re trying to be comforting. Then one evening the fantasy took a new turn. He laughed, threw me in the air, caught me, and whispered in my ear exactly what I needed to hear. And it was real. It was true. It completely resolved matters for me. I discussed this phenomenon in group therapy, and one of the group members, a logical man, simply couldn’t believe that the therapist accepted without question my certainty that the issue was resolved. It is one of my fondest memories of therapy.

Conclusion

Jungian therapy helped me find my own wholeness and gave me faith that at least one person, my therapist, knew who I was and honored how I was. I no longer feel crippled by some potentially debilitating life experiences, and I feel I have a self that is of value to offer to others. Even if very few people will ever want what I have to offer, that does not diminish my worth. And it does not diminish the worth of those who do not want my offering. Each of us travels by a different road.

At the same time, I feel a new kinship with the human race. Although I know that close relationships may be rare, I have had my share; and even though I still have difficulty feeling as if I belong in the crowd, I do belong on this earth. Our society is not, alas, a healthy place for a healthy person to be. But it is a place where a healthy person can promote the health of others and perhaps even of the human race. “We can now see that the unconscious produces contents which are valid not only for the person concerned, but for others as well, in fact for a great many people and possibly for all” (Jung, 1967, pp. 175-76). And even if no one else directly benefits from my growth, my own health can contribute to the world. “If things go wrong in the world,” Jung said, “something is wrong with me. Therefore, if I am sensible, I shall put myself right first” (Ferguson, 1980, p.99).

And I am now free to be creative in whatever way works for me. I know my inner voice speaks truth, and I have a chance to find my own vocation, even in terms as grand as Jung’s:

“Vocation acts like a law of God from which there is no escape.” The creative person is overpowered, captive of and driven by a demon. Unless one assents to the power of the inner voice, the personality cannot evolve. Although we often mistreat those who listen to that voice, [Jung] said, still “they become our legendary heroes.” (Ferguson, 1980, p. 109)

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