

The Individuation Process

by Dirk Gillabel, © 1983

www.soul-guidance.com

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.
William Blake*

The individuation process is a term created by the famous psychologist Carl Gustav Jung to describe the process of becoming aware of oneself, of one's make-up, and the way to discover one's true, inner self. Although the structure is basic and simple, the contents require a much deeper understanding.

For as long as mankind has existed, there were always people who asked themselves that most intriguing question: "Who am I". There is no simple answer, but Jung's individuation process provides us with some clear guidelines. First you need to understand a couple of terms, frequently used in psychology.

The ego. We are all familiar with the ego, or are we? What is the ego? When we say "I" or "me", what are we pointing to? The ego is the center of consciousness, but it is not what you are, as most people think. It is rather a function that allows you to distinguish yourself from others. It is a structure that orders your psychological qualities, so you can make sense of yourself and your actions. It gives you a sense of uniqueness, but know that we all have that in common.

What we also have in common is a conscious and an unconscious. With the conscious we are able to experience everyday life. The unconscious is a part of ourselves that kind of remains in the background, but is in no way inactive or inert. The unconscious is composed of hidden aspects of ourselves that continue to work on the conscious and thus on our everyday life, although we are not mostly not aware of it. The unconscious tries to bring man back into balance. In life we are not always able to do or be what we would like. Thus, the unconscious will influence our behavior and actions in a way that will compensate. These unconscious tendencies can be stronger than our conscious, and can even go against our will. Thus we tell things in a flare of anger, of which we will be very sorry afterwards.

Jung divided the unconscious in two parts: the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The personal conscious only belongs to yourself. It is the collection of subliminal perceptions, repressed or forgotten memories, wishes, and emotions in an individual. The memories of the personal unconscious can be evoked, although they cannot be totally controlled by will. Sometimes an accidental association will bring them to light. Sometimes they appear in dreams and fantasies. Hypnosis can also reveal them.

Another important term is the Self. The Self is often confused with the ego. As the ego is only a temporal structure that gives us an identity in this life, the Self is from a higher order than the ego. The Self is that what we are in essence. In

psychological terms, it encompasses the conscious, the unconscious, and the ego. The Self is the central archetype in the collective unconscious, like the Sun is the center of the solar system. The Self is the archetype of order, organization and unity. It unifies the personality. The Self is our goal of life, because it is the most complete expression of the highest unity that we call individuality.

The Collective Unconscious

The collective unconscious is an important concept in the psychology of Carl Gustav Jung. The collective unconscious is shared by us all. This means that it is present in each of us, a vast reservoir of the archetypes of the whole of humanity. It is accessible to everyone. In general, the collective unconscious consists of characteristics that many people have in common and which each of us inherit at birth. Fear and happiness, for example are inherited human characteristics. They arise without conscious motives but simply arise from inner necessity.

These archetypes are the result of the many experiences of life that repeat themselves: sunrise and sunset, the seasons, life and death, food, danger, and so on. They are symbols for the experiences of mankind.

The content of the archetype is basically unconscious. It undergoes a transformation when it becomes conscious or when it is being perceived. The way it is transformed depends on the state of consciousness of the individual in which the archetype has arisen.

An archetype is experienced as image and as emotion. It is especially recognizable in such typical and important human situations as birth and death, adolescence, extreme fear or a fearful experience. During such life phases and experiences archetypes will often appear clearly in dreams.

The form of the archetype is only partially determined. Its content is a primal image that can only be given form when it has become conscious, and thus has become filled with material from the conscious.

Thus archetypes, when becoming conscious, will shape themselves, for example in myths and fairy tales, depending upon the cultural background of the people. A fairy in Europe, for example will be dressed in medieval or renaissance clothing, while in the East it will wear ancient Eastern clothing and be more djinn like of appearance. The underlying content, however, remains the same wherever you go. Archetypes are like a frame. The frame remains the same, but the image that appears inside the frame will be dependent upon the circumstances.

Archetypes cannot be brushed aside. They will always manifest. When a society undergoes a change its manifestations of the archetypes will change too. They get another form, another image in the frame.

Archetypes by themselves are neutral, without value judgments attached to them, but they can be interpreted in a positive, negative or neutral way.

Individuation

Individuation means that one becomes a person, an individual, a totally integrated personality. It is a process of self realization during which one

integrates those contents of the psyche that have the ability to become conscious. It is a search for totality. It is an experience that could be formulated as the discovery of the divine in yourself, or the discovery of the totality of your Self. This does not always happen without pain, but it is necessary to accept many things that normally we would shy away from. Once a person has accepted the contents of his unconsciousness and has reached the goal of the individuation process, he is conscious of his relationships with everything that lives, with the entire cosmos.

Individuation is a natural, inherent process in man. It cannot be stimulated by something external, but it grows from the inside. Just as the body can become deformed or sick by lack of nutrition or movement, the personality can be deformed by lack of experience or education. Jung stresses that our modern world does not give enough opportunity to experience the archetype of the Shadow. When a child expresses his animal instincts, generally it is punished by its parents. Punishment does not lead to the extinction of the Shadow (repressed tendencies, more about this later on), which is impossible, but it leads to the suppression of this archetype. The Shadow retreats to an unconscious state, primitive and undifferentiated. Then, when the Shadow breaks through the repressive barrier, and this does happen once in a while, it manifests itself in a sinister, pathological way.

Transcendence

The first step of integration is individuation of all aspects of the personality, which is called the individuation process.

There is a second phase that Jung called the transcendental function. This function has the capacity to unify the opposite tendencies of the personality. The goal of transcendence is the realization of all aspects of the personality as they were originally concealed in the one's center, and the development of the potential unity. The transcendence is the means to realize the unity of the archetype of the Self.

The Individuation Process

The individuation process begins with becoming conscious of the Persona, the mask we take on in our every day life. After this we become conscious of the Shadow, the repressed characteristics of the ego. Then we become conscious of the Anima, the inner woman in each man, or the Animus, the inner man in each woman. Then the image of the old wise man, or the old wise mother appears, after which the experience of the Self happens.

These phases are not necessarily chronological in order or separated from each other. They can overlap each other or run parallel.

The Persona

The Persona is the mask we all wear, a mask that pretends individuality. It makes

us believe that one is a certain individual, but it nothing else than a well played role. The persona is a compromise one creates between himself and the community about how one appears to be. One adopts a name, a title, an occupation, and identifies oneself with this or that. One thinks that one is a businessman, a good father or a misfit, but all this are masks, ways we would like to be or appear to other people and does not always reflect who we really are.

The Persona is a complicated system for connecting the individual consciousness with society. One could call it a mask that makes an impression on other people, but also hides the true nature of the person. It partly results from the demands of a society that one has to play the role that has been ascribed to him. In your profession you need to fulfill the demands of that profession as well as possible. A society demands this as a sort of security measure. From a shoemaker is expected that he repairs shoes to the best of his abilities, not that he is a poet. It is not even wanted that he is a poet, because then society thinks that he is not totally reliable as a shoemaker. In academic circles, a similar person would be regarded as a dilettante, in politics he would be considered as unreliable, in the religious area he would become a free-thinker. As soon as one deviates from his role, he becomes a suspicious person, despite the fact that he might still be an excellent worker in his profession. Therefore, if one wants to make it in society, one can only devote himself to one single thing. Of course, few people are able to do this, as we all have more than one interest. To accommodate to the wishes of society, we create a mask, a Persona. What is behind that mask we call 'privacy'. This split in our behavior is not without consequences. If we neglect the development of the Persona, then people might find us insulting or they make our lives difficult, because they expect us to behave in the way society demands. At the other side, there is danger of identifying too much with the role that one is trying to fulfill.

The Shadow

The Shadow represents unknown or little known characteristics of the ego. When one tries to see his Shadow, he becomes conscious, and often ashamed of, the characteristics and impulses that he denies in himself but sees clearly in other people: for example: egotism, spiritual laziness, unreal fantasies, intrigues, indifference, cowardliness, greed, and all those little things of which we say "Oh, it doesn't matter. Nobody will notice, and besides other people are doing it too". The Shadow is the inferior being in all of us, it wants to do all those things that we do not allow ourselves to do, or that we don't want to be. It is the Mr. Hyde in relation to Mr. Jekyll.

The Shadow is not only about not doing something, but also about impulsive and ill considered deeds. Before you have time to think about it, a nasty remarks slips out, leaving you confronted with the result of something that you didn't really intended.

The Shadow is all those uncivilized desires and emotions that are incompatible with the norms of society and with our ideal personality. It is all we are ashamed

of, that we do not wish to be.

When a person joins other people, he automatically feels the need to behave as they do in order to be accepted. Thus, he suppresses more of his tendencies, and thus makes his Shadow bigger. The Shadow can also be a collective phenomenon in regards to the whole of humanity, like the devil or the witch.

While it is necessary to have a certain degree of suppression of one's characteristics in regards to one's role in society, the Shadow, remaining the unconscious, will increase in strength. When a moment arises that the Shadow must appear, it can be so powerful and dangerous that it can overwhelm the personality. It shows, for example, when one suddenly gets very angry. It certainly is true with the collective Shadow, when a mass of people is protesting and apparently innocent people turn violent.

In dreams the Shadow appears as a person of the same sex as the dreamer. The Shadow does not have to be an opponent. As it is a part of ourselves we need to take it, give it love and compassion, control it, guide it. The Shadow will only become hostile when it is not understood or is neglected.

The Anima

"There is in the unconscious of each man an inherent image of woman who helps him to understand her being."

The anima is the personification of all female psychological tendencies in the psyche of a man, including feelings, moods, intuition, receptivity for the irrational, the ability for personal love, a feel for nature, and the man's attitude toward the unconscious.

This image becomes conscious by real contacts with women, especially the first woman he encounters in his life. Normally this first woman is his mother, who is the most powerful in shaping him. There are men who have never been able to free themselves from her fascinating power. A man's experience of his mother is of course subjective. How she behaves is less important than his experience of how she behaves. The image he builds is not an exact representation of how she really is, but it is colored and shaped by his inherent ability to produce an image of her, that is, his anima.

If man has the feeling that his mother has had a negative influence on him, then the anima will often be expressed with irritating, depressive moods, insecurity, a feeling of being unsafe, and touchiness. This negative anima can be expressed in nasty, effeminate remarks, with which he demolishes everything possible.

Another anima trick is pseudo-intellectual dialogs which prevents a man from feeling life closely and coming to real decisions. He thinks so much about life that he cannot live, and he loses all spontaneity and the flow of life.

Without a healthy anima, a man becomes effeminate, or becomes the prey of women, and he is not capable of handling the difficulties of life. Such men can be very sentimental or touchy.

When he is grown up his image of the anima is projected onto the women that attract him. It is then that a lot of misunderstandings arise, as most men are not

aware that their projection does not correspond with who the woman is in reality. This is the cause of a lot of strange love affairs and divorces. Unfortunately, this projection does not happen in a rational way. It is not that a man is actively projecting, but that the projection happens to him automatically.

Because the anima is an archetype, she has characteristics that continue to appear throughout the ages. She has a quality of eternity. Often she looks young, although she has the feeling that she already has years of experience. She is wise but not overpowering. She often has the feeling of being special, or having a secret knowledge. She is often connected to the earth or water and can have great power. She has both a light and a dark aspect. She can be the pure, good, noble figure, almost a goddess, but she can also be a prostitute, a seductress or a witch. Especially in children's dreams these opposite aspects are pronounced. The dark aspect will most likely appear when a man has suppressed or underestimated his female nature, treating women with contempt or carelessness.

He anima can also appear in the form a fey or an elf and lure men away from their work or home, like the sirens in ancient times. In mythology and literature she continues to appear as a goddess and 'femme fatale'.

In the life of men the anima expresses herself not only in the projection to women, but also in his creative activities, in his fantasies, his moods, premonitions, and emotional explosions. An old Chinese text says that when a man wakes up in the morning with a heavy or bad mood, it is his soul, or anima, that is responsible for this. She disturbs his concentration by whispering absurd ideas and spoils his day by supplying him with a vague feeling that something is not all right, or she wanders through his dreams with seductive visions.

Positive and negative as just two sides of a coin. In essence the anima is a guide to the psychological development of a man. Each time when man's logical mind is not able to recognize or understand unconscious contents, his anima will help him to dig them out. His anima helps him to tune himself to the correct inner values and thereby helping him to open the door to his inner world. Thus the anima takes the role of guide and mediator in his inner world. Then man has to take serious those feelings, moods, expectations and fantasies sent by his anima, and fix them in one form or another, like writing, painting, sculpting. When he is working on this with patience then his unconscious contents will well up and connect with earlier material. Whatever results from it has to be examined both intellectually as well as with his feelings. It is important to consider it is not just 'fantasy', but that is very real.

The Animus

The animus in women is the counterpart of the anima in men. Like the anima, the animus has three roots: the collective image of a man that a woman acquires, her own experiences with men in her life, and the latent male principle in herself. The animus also has good and bad aspects. In contrast with the anima in men which appears most often in the form of erotic fantasies or moods, the animus has a stronger tendency to appear in the form of 'sacred' convictions. This male

part in women is apparent when she lectures with a loud, obtrusive, male voice, or by unreasonable, emotional scenes. Even in a woman who at the outside is very feminine, the anima can be a hard, unforgiving power. That woman can suddenly become stubborn, cold and completely inaccessible.

Typical for such women is the endless repetition of thoughts like: "The only thing in the world I want is love, but he doesn't love me." Or "In this situation there are only two possibilities, and both are as bad". The animus never believes in exceptions. In general one cannot contradict an animus, because usually it is right, but at the same time it doesn't quite fit the individual situation. It is mostly only a reasoning, an opinion. It looks right, but is beside the point.

Just as the anima of a man is formed by his experience of his mother, so the animus of a woman is formed through hers of her father. The father gives her indisputable 'true' convictions that never include the personal reality of the daughter herself.

In his negative aspect, the animus is personified by a cocoon of dreamy thoughts, filled with desires and judgments of 'how things must be', excluding the reality of her own life. In his positive aspect, he can be very valuable aid in building a bridge to the Self by his creative ability.

The animus often appears (especially in dreams) as a group of men, this shows that the animus personifies a collective element rather than a personal element. Because of the collective aspect, women usually in reference to "they' or 'everybody' include 'always', 'should' and 'must'.

The animus is a kind of a collection of fathers and similar authorities, who pass an intellectualized, indisputable judgment. It is mostly formed from words and opinions picked up from childhood on and later brought together into a canon of half-truths, a treasure chest of preconceptions. They are justified by "It is always done like that" or "Everybody is saying that it like this". This critical judgment can sometimes act against her self resulting in an inferiority complex limiting her self-initiative. In other situations she can turn against people in a completely destructive way. She will criticize her neighbors, demolish the reputation of strangers without any reasonable explanation, or she makes belittling remarks to her family members or people with whom she works with the opinion that "it is good for them", or "I like to call things by their name", or "I just do not want to spoil them".

An intelligent and developed woman is just as susceptible to the negative aspects of the animus as less developed one. A less developed woman will quote a newspaper instead of the state or a university. If her opinion is being questioned she will become quarrelsome or dogmatic. This side of a woman craves for power. She can become aggressive, dominating and unreasonable.

Because of this aspect of the animus it is very difficult for a woman to think in a non-prejudiced way. She always has to be aware of that inner voice that constantly tells her "that it needs to be this way", or "they should do it this way". The positive side of the animus is that when a woman needs the courage and the aggressively he will be there to support her. When a woman realizes that her opinions are based on generalities and authorities, then the animus can help her to look for knowledge and wisdom.

Significance of Anima and Animus

The way anima and animus function can be made conscious, but they are themselves factors that are transcendent to the conscious, and thus to perception and will. They remain autonomous and one needs to keep an eye on them. Anima and animus are mediators between the conscious and the unconscious psyche. They can be understood when they appear, personified, in fantasies, dreams, visions.

The Old Wise Man

After the anima and animus, the archetypes of the old wise man and the great mother arise, respectively in man and woman.

The old wise man appears in the form of king, hero, medicine man, savior, magician, saint, ruler over man and spirits, God's closest friend and so on. This archetype is a real danger for the personality, because once it has been aroused, a man can easily believe that he possesses 'mana', real magical power, and wisdom. He who is possessed by this archetype believes he is gifted with great (maybe esoteric) wisdom, prophetic gifts, the ability to heal and so on. Such a man can gather followers, as he has entered the unconscious way further than anybody else.

The archetype has a fascinating power, intuitively felt by people and not easily resisted. They are fascinated by what he is saying, but after analysis it is often not intelligent. The power of the old wise man can be destructive as it forces a man to act above his power and capacity. He does not possess the wisdom he claims. In reality it is the voice of the unconscious that should be subjected to criticism and analysis.

The Great Mother

In a woman the archetype of the great mother acts in a similar way to the old wise man in a man. Any woman possessed by this archetype, believes that she is gifted with an unlimited capacity to love and to understand, to help and to protect, and she will exhaust herself in service to others. The archetype can be destructive when the woman is fixated on the belief that anybody within her sphere of influence are 'her children' and therefore they are helpless or dependent on her.

The Experience of the Self

The process of individuation is not easy for Western man because he has difficulty with the concept of paradoxes. Nevertheless it is necessary to accept both the superior and the inferior, the rational and the irrational, the order and the chaos, light and darkness, yin and yang.

The Self, according to Jung, is not a kind of universal consciousness. It is rather an awareness of our unique nature and our intimate connection with all life. This life is not only human but also animal, with plants and minerals, and even the entire cosmos. It gives us a sense of 'unity' and acceptance of life as it is, and not as we might think we want it to be.

The Self is symbolized in the form a child, Christ, Buddha, and so on. In dreams it can sprout forth from an animal or an egg. The hermaphrodite, an often used alchemical image, is another symbol, it joins the opposites of male and female. Other images are the difficult to obtain treasure, a jewel, a flower, a golden egg or golden ball, a chalice like the Grail, and all fourfold images like mandalas.

Importance of the Environment

Jung thought that that heritage can play a role in the balance of a personality. Man can have inherent extrovert or introvert tendencies, or he can be a rather emotional type instead of an intellectual, and his anima can be strong or weak. The other major component in the development of a personality is the environment. The environment in which one grows up or lives, can deform, stimulate, or stabilize one's development. The environment can interfere with the growth of the personality by taking away the necessary stimuli or by making inappropriate contacts.

Parents play an extremely important role in the development of the character of the child. They are responsible for the mistakes of the child and for stimulating his good tendencies. During its first years, the child does not have its own identity. His psyche is a reflection of the psyche of his parents. Every psychic disorder of the parents is reflected in the child. When the child goes to school it starts to develop its own individuality. The influence of its parents can still be strong if they are overprotective, make decisions that the child should have made, and prevent the child from having sufficient experiences. Under these circumstances the individuation of the child is stunned.

The individuation process is also limited by parents who try to impose their own psychic tendencies onto the child, or when one of the parents is seeking to compensate for his/her own shortcomings through the child.

Jung was convinced that the educators have a much stronger influence on the individuation of a child than the parents. The educators should bring the unconscious in the student into the conscious. They could expand the conscious of students by providing him with a multitude of experiences. Educators are in a position to discover imbalances in the child and to help it to overcome weaknesses in its character. A child who is an overly developed intellectual type could be stimulated to come into contact with his feelings. An introvert student could be stimulated to show his extrovert side. However, the most important task of educators is the recognition of the individuality of each student and the promotion of a balanced development of individuality.