

## Jungian Psychotherapy

“The more scientific the study of (suffering) becomes, the more it must be viewed from the outside...The root metaphor of the (therapist’s) point of view is that human behavior is understandable because it has an inside meaning. The inside meaning is suffered and experienced. It is understood by the (therapist) through sympathy and insight”.

James Hillman, “Suicide and the Soul” pp42-44

Carl G. Jung (1875 – 1961) developed a psychodynamic or depth approach to psychotherapy that he called Analytical Psychology and this remains the officially accepted term. Jung’s approach acknowledged both conscious and unconscious aspects of the personality, or psyche and gave equal weight to both. Psychotherapists following in the tradition of Jung do likewise.

A person will come in with a current problem and this is the conscious side of things: the conscious attitude has got to a point where the person feels in need of help and so a therapist is found. The therapist will be interested in knowing as much as possible about that problem, when it started and how and where it is playing out in the life. This may be a clinically defined problem such as depression, anxiety, eating or personality disorder and so on, or it may be a relationship or general life problem such as grief, or deep and difficult to explain feelings of “just not feeling right” in some way. So far this is equivalent to what might happen with a psychotherapist of most orientations.

To gain insight into the impact of the problem at the unconscious level the therapist will additionally take note of any somatic symptoms and problems, any recent or recurring dreams that can be recalled, any unusual use of language or where emotional response seems smaller or larger than would be expected in the normal retelling of events. The purpose of the therapist is to begin and sustain a conversation and an immersion in the experience of the problem that incorporates and brings to consciousness the unconscious aspects of the problem. Unconscious aspects will also emerge through the relationship with the therapist and to the therapy setting. On Jung’s view, psychological distress is brought about and maintained through a conscious attitude that is out of balance and out of touch with the unconscious level. The idea being that as long as a problem remains entangled with largely unconscious forces and motivations it is not amenable to change simply through conscious effort or will. There is an emphasis on finding balance and emotional and bodily experience is given equal importance to intellectual thinking processes.

Contrary to many of his peers and approaches that have come since, Jung wrote of the suffering soul and the guiding spirit, finding that these are essential concepts in the path towards psychological wholeness that he referred to as ‘Individuation’. Like any psychotherapy, the motivation or goal of Jungian psychotherapy is to bring about an improved state of affairs for the individual seeking help but within a Jungian frame, perhaps more than most, in a manner defined by and perhaps entirely particular to that person and this could be at odds with social or external expectation. That is, the ‘improvement’ may not always seem so to others: A person who has always seemed easy going may start to be less so and more particular about her/his preferences; someone who has always put others first may start to consider her/himself more; someone who has always avoided argument at any cost may start to appear somewhat argumentative. Of course the individuation path is just as likely to render an argumentative person less so and in this instance others will gladly see the person as ‘improved’. The end point of a Jungian encounter is neither a model citizen nor a person freed of all troubles but a real person in touch with their dark and light sides and incorporating, assimilating and developing their own unique personhood.