

Jungian Archetypes and Pagan Healing Modalities

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The purpose of this paper is to briefly discuss the work of Carl Jung, and the impact of some of his psychology. More specifically, this paper will discuss the relation of modern Paganism with Jung's theory of archetypes. There is a strong correlation between the concept of Jung's collective unconscious and the psychological healing modalities employed by many Pagans and New Age practitioners. The counseling techniques that will be discussed are focused on meditation, visualization, and Tarot card reading.

We shall see that through these counseling approaches, the practitioner guides the seeker's understanding of his or her personal life and current situation in terms of archetypes. It is this communion with the collective unconscious that provides the psychological element of these forms of spiritual healing.

This paper is not meant to be an in depth study of Jung's archetypal theory. Nor is it intended to provide a definitive view of modern Paganism, Wicca, or Shamanism. The scope of this project is to examine an intersection of Jung's theories and modern Pagan and New Age modes for healing. Additionally, the discussion of Tarot cards is not meant to imply or endorse their widespread use or their reliability as a divining tool. The Tarot is discussed here only to provide an example of archetypes interacting with Pagan and New Age practices.

This project focuses on certain methods of psychological counseling, which is a form of spiritual healing. This paper will not

discuss the supposed effectiveness of such alternative healing techniques as; Reiki, Pranic Healing, Cranial-Sacral Healing, Laying-on-of-Hands or Healing Touch, or any other physically based healing modality, despite their widespread use in Pagan and New Age communities.

In order to relate the collective unconscious with these healing modalities, we must first develop our understanding of Jung's theory. According to Jung, an archetype is something like Plato's Ideas or Forms, an abstract that is "supra-ordinate" to all phenomenon of that type. ¹ Jung refers to "prototypes" and "primordial images" which "manifest" on another plane. ² Put more simply, Jung later defines archetypes as the images that each human is born with, the "human quality of the human being." ³ To simplify further, archetypes are the instinctual patterns of thought and behavior that humans have and other animals do not. Jung believes these are as evident as instincts. ⁴ If archetypes exist, they exist for all humanity and have existed from the beginning of humanity. ⁵ They come out of the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is the conjoining of individuals' unconscious or instinctual selves. ⁶ This confluence "houses" archetypes and provides humanity with an interconnected access point to archetypal images.

Perhaps we can further develop our understanding through the use of examples. In examining the Tarot, we shall sharpen our view of archetypes and begin to see how they influence spiritual healing.

Tarot cards are related to common modern playing cards. There are 4 suits; Cups, Pentacles or Disks, Swords, and Rods or Wands; each numbering from Ace to King. Each of these cards is assigned a meaning, which varies, dependant the placement of the card in the reading. The most significant portion of the Tarot is, for our purposes, what is called the Major Arcana. The Major Arcana is an additional set of cards, depicting people and stages of life. They number from zero to 22, and describe a collection of psychological states.⁷ It is in these cards that we find a link to the collective unconscious.⁸

Let us take the Major Arcana card number 3, for example. This card is the Empress, said to represent “fertility, safety, security, good advice. Great abundance, nurturing, and material wealth. Perhaps pregnancy. A woman who is competent and secure, and building a future for herself and her family. Plenty, joy, growth, and success.”⁹ The imagery on the card, although it varies from one deck to another, is a woman, often pregnant, sitting on a throne surrounded by lush fields or flowering trees. She is often wearing the symbol of Venus, or of Woman, she is accompanied by a rabbit and has a cornucopia full of food or fruits near her. She is usually wearing a crown.¹⁰ She is often referred to as the “archetypal mother” or woman.¹¹ The symbols on the card are in direct relation to Jung’s ideas of the mother archetype.

“The [mother] archetype is often associated with things and places standing for fertility and fruitfulness: the cornucopia, a ploughed

field, a garden. It can be attached to a rock, a cave, a tree, a spring, a deep well, or to various vessels such as the baptismal font, or to vessel-shaped flowers like the rose or lotus. ... Added to this list there are many animals, such as the cow, hare, and helpful animals in general.”¹²

We can see, now, how archetypes come into our conscious thought patterns as the recognition of these types of symbols. We can also see in this example how the Tarot provides us with a condensed version of the most characteristic of images of each archetype. In our example, we see that the Empress represents abundance and motherhood just by examining the image on the card. Without reading a word of text, our psyches have absorbed the images of pregnancy and of an over-filled cornucopia and related them to the archetype of mother.

To relate this to healing, we must establish the Tarot as a therapeutic technique. The Tarot provides a medium within which the seeker and the practitioner can interact. The practitioner can answer the seeker's question through the language of archetypes. So, as a seeker approaches a reading, they ask a question. This may be about the future, understanding current issues, or even delving into the past. The seeker has framed a problem in words for the practitioner. The practitioner would then lay the cards and observe the apparent issues addressed by the symbology of the cards. If the Empress card were to appear, the practitioner would be prompted to inquire about issues of

motherhood in the seeker's life. And, even if the seeker is totally unfamiliar with the Tarot and with Jung's theory, he or she will subconsciously relate the images on the Empress card with "mother."

Having developed an understanding of Jung's archetypes and of their relation to the Tarot, we will now continue to improve our description while we examine how they interact with mythology and with the healing modalities of modern Pagans and New Age Practitioners.

Before we can discuss the healing techniques of these individuals, we must determine who they are. That is, we must define and simplify these titles. A New Age practitioner, we will say, is someone who studies the various self-help and community-based self-improvement techniques that are in popular use. The term "New-Age" often refers to the movement of spiritual awakening that has taken place from the late 1960s and continues today. This term "usually refers to mixing metaphysical practices with a structured religion."¹³ This distinguishes the New Age practitioner from the Pagan, as a Pagan uses religious and self-help techniques as one and the same form of self-help.

"Pagan: From the Latin *paganus*, country dweller. Today used as a general term for followers of Wicca and other magical, shamanistic and polytheistic religions."¹⁴

Wicca is a specific type of Paganism, which, while practiced differently by each practitioner, usually includes a few major motifs:

“...reverence for the Goddess and the God; reincarnation; magic; ritual observances of the Full Moon, astronomical and agricultural phenomena; spheroid temples, created with personal power, in which rituals occur.”¹⁵

Another main focus that is common to most of Wicca is the Wiccan Rede, which basically states that the practitioner is free to do as she or she chooses, as long as s/he does no harm. “An it harm none, do as thou wilt.”¹⁶

From this point, we will refer to Pagans, card readers, Wiccans, and New Age practitioners simply as “practitioners.” We will refer to their patients, clients, students, etc. as “seekers.”

Now that we have established whom we are referring to, we can relate the healing techniques these practitioners use to Jung’s archetypal theory. Pagans and Wiccans have a religious interest in various forms of mythology. Being worshippers of different pantheons of Gods and Goddesses, these practitioners study myths of many different cultures. New Age practitioners are also disposed to study myths, either for religious reasons or to understand the social history of religion, or as method to understand archetypes and their effects.

“Archetypes [are] irrepresentable in themselves, but their effects appear in consciousness as the archetypal images and ideas. These are collective universal patterns or motifs, which come from

the collective unconscious and are the basic content of religions, mythologies, legends, and fairytales.”¹⁷

We see here that the characters in myths, legends, and fairytales are based on archetypal images. That means that the Empress card relates to the archetypal image of woman not only for the external symbols of fertility, but because she wears the symbol of the Goddess Venus.

Pagans and New Age practitioners have used meditation and visualization as techniques for healing. Meditation is useful in preparing both the patient and the healer.¹⁸ Through guided meditation and visualization, a practitioner can lead the seeker through the plot of a story or myth, thereby teaching the seeker the lessons imparted in the story. Because meditation is a close communication with the subconscious, this also provides access to the collective unconscious. Therefore, the practitioner can guide the seeker through the myth, with both seeker and practitioner aware of the archetypes being portrayed. We shall illustrate this through the practice of utilizing the Sumerian myth, “The Descent of Inanna” in visualization and healing.

In the interests of simplicity, we will only review a brief paraphrasing of this myth and a brief account of this method being utilized as a healing modality. This topic alone has been the study of several works and is used by psychologists, New Age healers, and Pagans to initiate spiritual healing.

A brief sketch of the myth is as follows: Inanna is the Queen of Heaven. She sees that although she controls life, it is her sister, Erishkigal, who has control over death. She goes to the Netherworld and instructs her follower, Ninshubar, to appeal to the father gods for help if she does not return within 3 days. Upon hearing of Inanna's arrival, Erishkigal orders that her sister be treated as everyone is upon entering the Netherworld. So, as Inanna reaches each of the seven gates, she is stripped of a piece of her clothing, and when she reaches the Netherworld, Erishkigal kills her. Inanna is turned into a hanging piece of rotting meat. After 3 days, Ninshubar appeals to the gods and one takes pity on Inanna. He sends mourners to commiserate with the grieving Erishkigal until she releases Inanna's corpse to them. They provide her the food of life and she is restored. She selects her unfaithful husband to replace her in the Netherworld.¹⁹

In late November of 2003, Dr. Jalaja Boheim led 14 women in a weekend-long workshop, which involved visualizing the descent of Inanna as a personal journey. That is, through meditation, the seekers at this workshop took on the role of Inanna and visualized their own descent into the Netherworld.

Hayda, a pagan woman and participant in this workshop described its method and effectiveness. "It was really the perfect coupling of psychological and spiritual healing." She states that her intentions were to relieve herself of her sense of self-doubt and illusions.²⁰ She soon

discovered, however, that she was to work on understanding her issues of abandonment. Since she lost her parents as an infant, she has always known of her psychological wounds relating to parents and motherhood. As the workshop progressed, it began to address deeper psychological issues. At one point, a meditation was led in which Inanna was likened to the Light Goddess and Erishkigal to the Dark Goddess.²¹ It was during this meditation that she realized that her main goal was to realize and work on abandonment. It was at the very same moment that another woman realized her goal was to realize her issues of beauty and femininity.²²

The likening of Inanna to the light and Erishkigal to the dark is a method of introducing the concept of the shadow self to a seeker.

“Psychologically, we see these two energy patterns in the empathetic and self-isolating modalities that are basic to feminine psychology, in relation to all inner and outer partners – children, creative projects, lovers, even to a woman’s own autonomous emotions and perceptions and thoughts.”²³

Circe, a leader of a pagan group in North Carolina, referred to her group as a “healing coven.” That is, the women came to her group to be healed from the psychological trauma of an event or pattern in their lives. She used a similar method in the healing of these traumas. She used the myth of the “Rape” or “Abduction of Persephone.”²⁴ This myth

also involves a descent into the underworld, and is often compared with the descent of Inanna.²⁵ Jung uses the names of Demeter and “The Kore” (the Roman name for the Greek Persephone) to define shadow and self.²⁶

Both of these myths are used in meditation and visualization to provide a structured story that the unconscious understands. That is, the seekers see themselves as these Goddess characters and see their trauma as these stories, and the end result is a deeper understanding and healing from these traumas. As these stories are a connection with the archetypes of woman as beautiful, woman as mother, etc., now that trauma has a place in identifying the seeker with those archetypes. Further, these myths of the underworld relate the seekers to their shadow selves, and help to integrate the two sides of the self.

Religious healing involves “overcoming impediments that interfere with realizing (i.e. *knowing* and *achieving*) one’s Self-nature in its full identity and freedom”.²⁷ In our brief discussion we have examined how this type of religious healing is created among Pagans and New Age practitioners. Our discussion of Tarot cards illuminated the way archetypal images influence our perceptions. It also revealed how discussion of archetypes improves communication in counseling situations. Our discussion of mythology has involved the myth of “The Descent of Inanna.” This myth has served as a blueprint for individualized archetypal discovery for seekers from many paths.

Jung's psychology plays a large role in spiritual healing, through personal counseling. Whether it is a casual tarot reading, or a more in depth, meditative healing journey, the access to archetypes is key to spiritual healing. This interconnection between spiritual health and psychological health may be a tool to understand how both professional counselors and New Age and Pagan practitioners may further help and encourage their clients toward wholeness.

End Notes - Citations

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