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Psyche and Soma: A Jungian Inquiry into the
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Bonnie Bright

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bonniebright@depthinsights.com

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In so far as no man is born totally new, but continually repeats the stage of development last reached by the species, he contains unconsciously, as an *a priori datam*, the entire psychic structure developed both upwards and downwards by his ancestors in the course of the ages” (Jung, 1959, p. 278).

“Whereas we think in periods of years, the unconscious thinks and lives in terms of millennia” (Jung, 1959, p. 217).

Ancient Egypt taps into the power of the mind’s eye. With its soaring pyramids, sacred tombs, complex hieroglyphs, ancient temple walls, legends of exotic pharaohs, and colorful pantheon of gods, it is easy to be captivated by the landscape of a culture that fills the imagination with its richness and depth. Though Jung traveled extensively in Egypt, he never published a condensed work on his experience and analysis of the culture. However, it seems clear that the breadth and depth of one of the most ancient civilizations on the planet also provides fertile substance for understanding the human psyche. Indeed, there seems to be a “spiritual profundity” about the land, history, and culture of Egypt that goes beyond modern cosmography (Naydler, 1996). Egypt, with its pervasive myth of Osiris as the resurrected god of the underworld, the use of mummification in elaborate funerary rituals to ensure eternal life, and above all, the powerful Nile that ebbed and flowed as the lifeblood of the land, embodies an archetype of death and rebirth, a profound worldview that was the backbone of ancient Egyptian culture. Surely, the vivid images conjured in a culture centered on “hieroglyphic thinking” are the very same as those of Jung’s collective unconscious, provoking “an imaginative vision that sees through the physical landscape into its interiority” (p. 14).

Alchemy, Archetypes, and Individuation

Egypt is said to be the birthplace of alchemy. The etymological root, *al kimia*, refers to the “Land of Black Soil”, or the fertile mud of the Nile, that precious life-giving water that flooded the

land each year enabling life to continue and thrive (Cavalli, 2002). As a metaphor which Jung himself equated to individuation, the pursuit of alchemists was to find the *agua permanens*, the living water which represented illumination through the realization of meaning (Harris, 2001). The black mud that remained behind as the raging waters of the Nile receded is a rich analogy for the dark, shifting arena of the unconscious. The goal of alchemy, Cavalli insists, was to bring light to darkness, whether by turning lead into gold or shining the light of consciousness into the human mind. Metzner (2009) refers to alchemy as “the systematic technologies of physico-psychic-spiritual transformation” (p. 12), crediting Jung and his followers with retrieving the lost language of alchemy and using symbolic and imaginative process to interpret and apply it.

Normandi Ellis (2000), who wrote her own translation of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, believes the Egyptians practiced their own version of renewal and growth in everyday life, saying “The divine is and always was, even to the ancient Egyptians, meant to be apprehended here and now” (para. 14). She insists that by allowing ourselves to see the divine powers manifest all around us as the ancient Egyptians did, we begin to treat the world everyday as sacred and holy. The Egyptians sought the secret of regeneration, of turning death into life. This was practiced not only on the material level through the elaborate preparation of tombs, the carrying out of funerary rituals, and the practice of mummification to enable the soul to continue into eternity, but also through the Mysteries of Osiris, god of the underworld who represented rebirth. Ellis insists, “Light becoming light consciously understood during one's lifetime is better than learning it unconsciously after death” (Ellis, 2000).

In describing the process of individuation as an alchemical process, Jung maintained that the point of individuation was not to become perfect or attempt to overcome or master our personal psychology, but to become familiar with it, thereby coming into relationship with the parts of ourselves that have become repressed, numbed, split off, or disowned (Sharp, 1991). A lack of relationship between the individual and the Self can lead to pathology when the Self is not realized

(in the body), often erupting in symptoms (Edinger, 1995). Likewise, contemporary psychologist, John Weir Perry (1976) attributes the psychotic break of schizophrenic patients to a visionary state in which an archetypal renewal process is attempting to manifest. Jung argued that before renewal can occur, we must reconnect our individual lives with our historical roots—the deep symbolic and archetypal images of the past (Edinger, 1995). The mytho-historical culture of ancient Egypt provides a powerful opportunity to relate the historical with the personal in a way that can put us in touch with greater wholeness.

Egyptian theology perceived the structure of a man to include far more than his mortal shell, but rather a complex interaction of his physical body with his spiritual body, as well as with his divine intelligence and his heart, the seat of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding (Ellis, 2000). Thus, the worldview of ancient Egypt provides a corollary link between body and spirit, the antithesis to the current western tendency to separate spirit and matter, psyche and body, a theme Jung addressed in many of his writings, saying, “The body is merely the visibility of the soul, the psyche; and the soul is the psychological experience of the body” (in Ryan, 2002, p. 27). Indeed, Jung believed that if one goes deep enough into the rhizome, psyche and matter are one (Ryan, 2002). For the ancient Egyptians, the physical and spiritual realms were transparent to each other, and “through the symbolic image and the power of the imaginative perception, the spiritual order was made accessible in and through the physical” (Naydler, 1996, p. 23).

Jung believed the archetype is a unifying factor between the psyche and the material realm (Ryan, 2002). Death as a precursor to rebirth was a common archetypal motif found in ancient Egypt (Perry, 1976). Von Franz pointed out that, though all cultures hold the hope of life after death, ancient Egypt is the only culture that made it so concrete through mummification (Harris, 2001). The elaborate funerary process was tantamount to ensuring eternal life. Pharaohs spent most of their kingship planning for the preservation of their physical body and constructing elaborate tombs replete with all the belongings they would require for an ongoing eternal existence. If the

body was not properly preserved from decay, or if the soul was unable to find, recognize, and reunite with the mummified body, it could not continue into the afterlife (Cox & Davies, 2007). Organs removed during mummification were preserved in four specialized *canopic* jars topped with heads representing the four sons of Horus and waited in the tomb for the soul's return (David, 2002). Thus, the boundaries between matter and spirit blurred as mummies were viewed as objects imbued with meaning, a sort of "sacred self" for most Egyptians, endowed with energy and a waiting future (Meskell, 2004). Ultimately, the sacred embalming process of the Egyptians constituted a rebirth into immortality through alchemy, transforming the body into something glorified and indestructible, an eternal fruit (Edinger, 1995).

In the tomb itself, detailed drawings painstakingly etched on the walls provided explicit directions on how to navigate the underworld and to guide the soul back to its waiting body (David, 2002). Edinger (1995) reminds us that the tomb is a symbol of the unconscious as well as an alchemical vessel in which transformation occurred, and that Jung related it to the womb, suggesting the tomb is a place of the past that connects us with our deceased ancestors, a place from which the psyche is born, a connector to our psychic background. The tomb also represents the completion of circle as a place where we will ultimately rejoin the ancestors once more.

Archetype of the Resurrected God: Osiris

Another archetypal symbol is found in mythical Osiris. Legend has it Osiris was tricked by his brother, Set, who locked him in a chest and launched it into the Nile. The chest tumbled downstream until it came to rest in the low branches of a tree that quickly grew up around it. Eventually, the tree became so tall and strong, the King of Byblos cut it down and made it a pillar in his castle, never guessing it's branches enfolded the chest in which Osiris lay. Isis, distraught over the loss of her husband, canvassed Egypt, until she found the pillar with the coffin inside. But, once again, Set attacked Osiris, dismembering him into 14 separate pieces, scattering them about the

marsh along the Nile. Isis flew about Egypt in the form of a vulture seeking out and gathering the parts of her beloved Osiris whom she eventually reconstructed. Osiris became the judge and ruler of the *Duat*, the underworld (Seton-Williams, 1999).

The archetypal image of the resurrected divinity allows the human mind to transcend impending mortality by conjuring symbolic images of victory over death through eternal cycles of life, death, regeneration, and rebirth, climaxing in the discovery that the one who suffers is transformed into a divinity (Monday, n.d.). Perry's belief that schizophrenic symptoms are a manifestation of the urge for renewal and regeneration correlates with this archetypal urge to make order out of chaos and to transcend the dark depths of death, emerging in divine form. It also represents the hero's journey in the process of individuation, mapping the difficult descent one must make into darkness on the path to reunification with the Self. The exhaustive quest of the Egyptians for eternal life is analogous to that of the early alchemists who also sought a process that transcended death. It is also akin to Jung's concept of the search for Self, the so-called God within (Harris, 2001). Jung (1959) reminds us the Egyptian pharaoh is referred to as "twice-born", both human and divine, connecting the archetype to its recurrence in Christian tradition, writing, "The Christian era itself owes its name and significance to the antique mystery of the god-man, which has its roots in the archetypal Osiris-Horus myth" (1961, p. 68).

The legend of Osiris represents the death and rebirth of the ego through alchemical *solutio*, the disintegration by water and reversion to the vegetative psyche, the state of a tree, and through *separatio*, the dismemberment and scattering of pieces of the *prima materia* in the darkness along the Nile (Edinger, 1995). The *Duat*, or underworld, was seen as a place of the unknown, with the disappearance of the sun into the western horizon as it was "swallowed" by the goddess Nut, symbol of the heavens. As in the process of individuation, the *Duat* symbolizes the deeply interior world through which one must pass before manifesting again into the outer physical world (Naydler, 1996). Egyptian beliefs suggested as the sun traversed the underworld, it battled a

gigantic serpent that tried to prevent it being born again on the eastern horizon. Then, in the deepest part of night, the sun, Re (or Ra), encountered the body of Osiris, king of the underworld, and together the two united, enabling life to continue (Silverman, 1997).

Though, in the legend of Osiris, Isis was able to reassemble most of the 14 pieces, she could not find the phallus which has been swallowed by a fish. Once an artificial replacement was made, Isis became pregnant by Osiris and gave birth to Horus who is now representative of the rejuvenated kingly body. Thus, the conscious re-remembering of what was once unconscious becomes transformational as something new arises out of the depths. Rebirth can occur only after being swallowed by the darkness and emerging again following struggle and eventual unification and transcendence (Edinger, 1995).

Kundalini Yoga and the Chakras

Jung (1967) reiterated the importance of the physical body as an alchemical vessel in the individuation process, believing kundalini yoga to be an analogy for a union of consciousness and life in which the “unconscious becomes conscious in the form of a living process of growth” (p. 79). Harris (2001) insists on an inherent connection between the physical realm and energetic or spiritual process of growth: out of the body develops the spirit. Conger (1988/2005) describes kundalini as a “serpent of divine life [which] uncoils in the dark pelvis of our unconscious and moves through the lotus centers [of our bodies] connecting the darkness and light, our unconscious and our awakened state” (p. 188). He refers to Heinrich Zimmer as saying, “All the gods are in our body” (p. 188). Indeed the Egyptians believed this too, referring to the body as being inhabited by gods or *neters*, a word etymologically related to “nature” and symbolizing the living spirit in all things, the ensoulment of the world (Ellis, 2000). Though body awareness and spiritual awakening have been increasingly separated in western culture, attention to the energetic flow in the body along the spine can lead to “enlightened, embodied being” (Conger, p. 189).

Jung lectured that each of the initial chakras corresponds to one of the four elements, enabling alchemy to take place (Shamdasani, 1932/1996). The first chakra, the *muladhara*, represents our root support or groundedness, and embodies earth. Jung referred to this chakra as our conscious “personal bodily existence on this earth” (p. 23). According to Jung, in *muladhara*, the ego is awake but the self is asleep, which means the gods are also asleep (p. 14).

The second chakra, *svadhisthana*, represents water, the unconscious, the ocean containing the leviathan with which we must wrestle. Though water portends possible annihilation, it also suggests baptism, referred to by the alchemists as a symbol of renewal in the transformative process (Edinger, 1995). Jung refers to how the sun dies into the watery western sea at night and insists one can only take the journey into the unconscious if one has initiated the great serpent, *kundalini*, our motivating passion (Conger, p. 187), calling to mind the serpent with which the Egyptians believed the soul to wrestle before emerging from the underworld into a new day. This potential night sea journey corresponds to the flooding of the Nile river each year, a watery initiation, which, though initially dreadful and destructive, ultimately leads to fertility and recurring life. Water is the “alchemical divine water, the elixir of immortality” (Harris, 2001, p. 84) and the water of the womb, the original *prima materia*. In ancient Egypt, it was Isis’ tears that acted as the transforming agent in the re-membering of Osiris, and land arose from the primeval waters of creation. Jung referred to the chaotic water from which the universe flows as the “secret place”, the inner life, and the place where “the spark of the light of nature can be found” (In Edinger, 1995, p. 163). Edinger calls the divine water the “liquid version of the Self” (p. 162).

According to Jung, the third chakra, the *manipura*, is an enantiodromia, a reversal of energy (Shamdasani, 1932/1996). Located in the solar plexus, it represents fire, the heat at the center of the earth, the seat and source of emotions, sex, and power. Fire can show up in the form of passion, but it can also cause a firestorm. Complexes often cause people to “blow up” because they suddenly re-enter a world of fire they became detached from years before, only to find the embers are still

glowing (p. 36). Jung points out that though fire is often thought of as destructive, it can also be a creative force. In Egypt, the sun god, Re, was the father of all gods.

The fourth center, known as the *anahata*, is located in the heart and represents air. Associated with the lungs, it relates the inner and outer worlds, with breath being the connector with Divine Spirit. Here, thought and feeling are joined, and we become aware of invisible things and a knowing that we are contained in something greater than ourselves. This, per Jung, is where individuation begins as we are lifted above the surface of our emotions like the solar boat that carries the sun across the sky in Egyptian myth, separating the heat of passion from a separate, conscious Self (Conger, 1988/2005; Shamdasani, 1932/1996).

The fifth center, called the *visuddha*, the area of the throat, relays that “psychical essences are the fundamental essences of the world” (Conger, p. 188). The sixth, the *ajna* is the third eye. Here, the god awakens and the intuitive function commences, able to see “the images and energy that govern our lives” (Conger, p. 188). The seventh, the *sahasrara* or crown chakra, symbolized by the lotus of the thousand petals, is considered the gateway to other realities. It connects with the mystical and the eternal (Shamdasani, 1932/1996).

Objects Imbued with Meaning in an Ensouled World

The alchemical mandate, “As above, so below” held true for the ancient Egyptians. In their landscape, image was not static, but rather an agentic force—alive, dynamic, and active. In ancient Egyptian language, the word “sculptor” translated as “He who keeps alive” (Meskell, 2004, p. 89), pointing to the sacred life force with which objects were endowed. The animated spirit of the deity literally entered the statue making it an earthly incarnation of the divine that could be petitioned directly. A statue was born and not made: it did not represent the form of the god but *gave* him form instead. Temples were designed to be microcosms of the larger universe in which the visible and invisible met, where “obelisks pierced the heavens” (p. 91), and the landscape was a manifestation of divine order and harmony.

The body was considered a temple, and correspondingly, the temples were dedicated to the spiritual transformation of man. The holy temples in the material world were designed on the proportion of the human body with the head overlaying the *naos*, the inner sanctuary: the holy of holies (Ellis, 2000), and the Temple of Luxor was known as "The Temple of Man". Inhabited by the gods, every part of the physical body was a part of the divine body and had a spiritual function. Mummification rituals included dedicating each part of the body to a god during the mummification process, saying: "My hair is the hair of Nu. My eyes are the eyes of Hathor. My face is the face of Ra" (para. 10) and so forth.

Ellis (2000) insists that Osiris, whose body parts were strewn along the Nile, represents the idea that the spiritual impulse for regeneration is located throughout the known world, saying:

Osiris is to be found in the rising river, in the greening fields, in the majestic trunk of a tree, in the rich black soil, in the constellation Orion appearing in the winter sky. Osiris is an omnipresent reminder that life on earth is a gift of the divine. The body of Osiris is a sensual body, oriented toward earthly experience. (para. 16)

As a symbol of new life, Osiris is often pictured with green skin to represent the powerful fertility of a seed bursting into verdant vegetation. Enthronement rituals for the pharaohs included paying homage to Osiris by reenacting his death and resurrection in order to renew the pharaoh's rule for the New Year. Osiris was also honored annually for the flooding of the Nile, the lifeblood of Egypt, which launched the growing season and renewed agriculture that would feed the people for the coming year (David, 2002). Symbolically, the Nile was the spine in the body of Egypt, representing the unimpeded flow of energy with temples corresponding to each chakra along the spine.

The Nile as the Spine of Egypt

Ancient Egyptian temples to the gods strategically grace the banks of the Nile as it runs from South to North. (Mishlove, 1995). Egyptian archaeologist Fadel Gad suggests the sacred

temples may represent the 12-hour journey a soul takes as it traverses the landscape of the underworld. Each hour, and thus each temple location, can be associated with the individual chakras, centers of psychic awareness, and is designed to conduct kundalini by stimulating a certain level of psychic functioning (Mishlove, 1995). According to Gad, the temple of Abu Simbel in the far south near the Sudan border, built by Ramses the VI, with nearby temple dedicated to his wife Nefertari, represents the balance of male and female energy, corresponding to the second chakra. Further north of Kom Ombo in Aswan, the temple at Karnak, is dedicated to Amon-Re, the father god, and corresponds to the solar plexus, the center responsible for power and drive. On the way to Abydos, the first dynastic capital of Egypt where Osiris was said to have been resurrected, the sanctuary at Dendarah, dedicated to Hathor, the goddess of love, can be correlated with the heart chakra (Mishlove, 1995).

In the southern part of Cairo, the Egyptians honored Ptah, the "architect of the universe". Sokkara, the earliest known pyramid in Egypt was designed by Imhotep, the son of Ptah, a notorious healer and sage who contributed to the early development of Egyptian culture. Both Ptah and Imhotep are associated with the throat chakra, the intuitive center linked to teaching, communication, and cultural knowledge. The pyramids at Giza in modern-day Cairo symbolize the visionary experience of the forehead chakra, the third eye, and the tombs beneath, the unknown, unseen spaces of the unconscious. North, Heliopolis, the home of the most ancient sun god, Ra, and the place where the first order emerged from primeval chaos represents the lotus of the crown chakra (Mishlove, 1995).

Individuation Translated into the Physical Realm in Temples

Jungian Wim van den Dungen (2009) insists that the process of individuation was literally made spatial in Ancient Egypt, as if "it were eternalizing the stages of spiritual growth in the architecture of the temples" (para. 11). From the initial invocation of the quaternity during

purification rituals in the peristyle courtyard of the outer temple through corridors and offering rooms to the Great Hall, the pharaoh symbolically penetrated the mysterious space of shadows which symbolized the unconscious. When he opened the doors of the *naos*, the center of mandala-like constellation of chapels and halls, the Pharaoh confronted the god in his inner sanctum in solitude as one divine being to another, ultimately realizing his divine self. Here, he ritually implored the gods to restore their presence in the land, repairing and renewing any loss or rupture that had occurred during the night. Symbolically, the various areas of the temple and phases of the sacred process can be said to correlate to the phases of alchemy, from the courtyard representing the *nigredo*, through the shadows of the pronaos and hypostyle, beyond the offering hall enlivened by spirit, past the *albedo* or *illuminato* realm of the ambulatory, and finally, to the *rubedo* or the Self, the divine center of the naos or inner sanctum (van den Dungen, 2009).

The Spine as the Axis Mundi

The spine is the center of the nervous system, literally the backbone of our existence. Ancient Egyptians referred to the “spine of Osiris”, a *djed*, a vertical bar with three or four cross bars representing the tree in which his coffer lay before it was cut down and taken into the palace of the king as a central pillar. The *djed* was said to represent the re-emergence of Osiris from the Nile in his new, eternal form, his vehicle to connecting the underworld with the worlds above. Any soul aspiring to continue its existence in the afterlife had to “become an Osiris”, referring to Osiris as the vehicle by which this journey occurred (Perry, 1976).

Just as the *djed* was the pillar upon which the earth was supported, it is the spine of our bodies that supports the alchemical container in which we practice individuation, or psychic alchemy, on a daily basis. Shamans worldwide journeyed using the *axis mundi*, the world tree, a pillar that supports the world (Ryan, 2002). Harris (2001) refers to the spine as the axis between heaven and earth, saying just as our backbone supports us from behind, our relationship to the

unconscious supports us as if God were standing behind us. Jung (1972) contributed his own symbolic spine in psychology with his continuum linking psyche and matter, spanning from ultraviolet to red.

Ancient Egyptians often included a ladder in the tomb of the deceased in order to aid them in their ascent to the upper world (Harris, 2001). However, Harris cautions us that to ascend is to join the gods in their world and we must keep our feet on the ground, pointing to the fact that a tree, in order to be properly and naturally balanced, must have a root system that extends into the earth the same distance that its branches reach into the sky. The center point of a tree, she reminds us, is just where it emerges from the earth corresponds to the center point of our own spine just at the level of the sacrum, a word that relates to “sacred”, and at the fifth vertebrae, the *quinta essentia*, the place of division and transformation in the spine” (p. 81).

The ancient Egyptians developed a complex map to eternal life, but it all came down to placing the physical body in the bowels of the dark earth, a tomb designed to incubate the reunification of body and spirit. In alchemy, the *prima materia* must be subjected to *solutio*, to undergo dissolution and fundamental change in the blackness of *nigredo* in order to transform into gold. So, too, it is crucial to engage with the world, to be of the earth, to give over to the place of tension and darkness, in order to allow for something to give way to the Self. Jung believed if we do not, we will remain suspended, fixed in time, and individuation cannot occur. In the energetic flow of kundalini yoga, the earth holds the lowest position: the chakra is located at the base of the abdomen, and, like the lowest part of the tree, the rhizome, this is where things begin. Jung insists we must make roots or the plant can never grow; kundalini cannot begin. In a final alchemical image perhaps worthy of being called “hieroglyphic thinking”, Jung says, “We are entangled in the roots, and we ourselves are the roots” (Shamdasani, 1932/1996, p. 29). After the Nile recedes, new life can finally begin again as the roots begin to grow.

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