

ADDENDUM IV

SELF-REPORT

In the endeavour to ‘approach the unconscious’ through the method of active imagination, I will focus on its two major stages as suggested by Chodorow, (1997:10) and Aziz (1990:25) following Jung namely; firstly letting the unconscious come up; and secondly coming to terms with its contents. Although an image or idea may first appear in the mind’s eye, more often than not, images arise spontaneously during activities such as writing, drawing and painting. They indicate that the first stage may be facilitated by choosing an image from a dream and concentrating on it which in my case will involve focusing on the image of a house.

Jung (cited in Aziz, 1990:26; Raff, 2000:21) speaks of the need for systematic exercises to eliminate critical attention and produce a vacuum in consciousness. This part of the experience involves a suspension of rational and critical faculties in order to give free rein to the imagination.

The second stage, or the coming to terms with the unconscious content, encompasses the decisive conscious communication and consequently the merging of opposites where insight becomes real and demands to be carried out in practice (Aziz, 1990:26; Raff, 2000:21). During the process, the affects and images of the unconscious flow into awareness and consciousness actively becomes involved with the experience such a spontaneous string of insights which have to be evaluated and integrated or “*to live it in life*” (Chodorow, 1997:12). For Jung (cited in Aziz, 1990:26; Raff, 2000:22), the second stage is the more important part because it involves questions of meaning and moral demands.

Archetypal amplification, a method that Jung used for the interpretation of symbols in narrative and dreams will be used for the elucidation of the images emerging during active imagination. The focus of the exercise will be on describing the experience of confronting the unconscious.

• **Stage one**

I feel very apprehensive about what I may encounter and at the same time fearful that I may not be able to extract any images from my unconscious mind. I feel restless and can't seem to get myself to concentrate on the idea of a house for any period of time without thoughts such as "What nonsense", or drifting to concerns about my studies, my children, all the work I have to do and a small voice telling me that this is nothing more than mere indulgence.

Eventually, I decided to use a deep breathing technique which seemed to have helped to calm my chaotic mind. For a long period all I could see in my mind's eye was a small dot that kept on disappearing as a faint light in the distance and re-appearing. Suddenly in a flash, a complete image of a tower 'dropped' into my conscious awareness. What amazed me was that it was not a gradual development or slow emergence of the image; it appeared without prior notice and gave the impression of being a charcoal or black and white sketch of a medieval or ancient stone tower. Even the background looked like a scorched, austere and desolate landscape. I immediately experienced a profound sadness and indescribable anxiety because I was in a tower which had no windows, doorway or way out. What was eerie was that a spiral staircase ran along the outside of the tower. I seem to have built myself (or my Self?) into an inescapable and confining structure of hopelessness and despair. At that moment a second image 'dropped' into my conscious mind, a beautiful and brightly coloured image of a forest which had the feeling of serenity and peace. It felt like Paradise.

• **Stage two**

My immediate association with the tower is that it represents my consciousness, my involvement in the social environment and my future which all appear to be inhibited and dreary. My conscious engagement with and hence interpretation of this image from the unconscious is one of disillusionment in the human condition and the ease with which people (including myself) betray the subtle hints of truth presented outside the scientific and academic realms. It also attests to the illusion of the security to be found in stereotypical and social constructs of reality. The surety of

long-held notions may turn out to be imprisoning the Self in its quest for unity.

In addition to feeling imprisoned or contained, I think the symbol of the tower represents the required awareness of 'bonds that bind' to assist their dissection and allow the development of my Self. It is as if the unconscious image with its affective tone of despair and loneliness is attempting to shock the conscious mind into awareness that no external force will release me but Myself. However, these thoughts may represent 'intellectualisations' which appear devoid of affective associations and fail to reflect the deeper meaning the image reveals.

I noticed during this part of the active engagement with the unconscious that what I experienced was not dialectic or an inner dialogue involving a constant stream of exchanges, but rather an inner discussion involving multiple components. It appeared like a constant 'fragmented' interplay between the unconscious, the conscious and established socio-cultural notions as an absent partner. In certain instances, the image seemed to 'interrupt' the conscious and intellectual interpretation, with the result that the 'meeting' between the two opposites at first appeared 'rambling' and incoherent with meaning 'emerging' rather than being determined as a result of a negotiation between the conscious and unconscious. Additionally, the image 'participated' in the rendition by adding more aspects as the conscious mind described it. The process does not represent a linear exchange, but rather a cyclical 'patchwork' where the interpretations are constantly shifting from one possibility to another with the image providing the impetus and conscious awareness trying to make it fit into an existing framework of meaning.

What was also experienced was that disconnected remnants of thoughts, memories and feelings emerged which were related to significant life experiences and not necessarily to the image. The only way I can describe it is by comparing it to riding on a carousel and trying to focus on the scenes in the rest of the playground while going around in circles. You only catch glimpses of events which are continually shifting and your attention is frequently being divided between the experiences of the ride and trying to consciously identify aspects of the motionless playground. It appears that, in trying to decipher the meaning of the image, faintly remembered clusters (hence complexes) of associations emerge which assemble around a central

theme related to your life situation, hence an interdependent network of clusters of meaning seem to emerge. The thoughts never appeared to be, or were experienced as full verbal sentences, rather they were more like flashes or fragments of memories, feelings, insights and intuitive understandings.

I also noticed that the 'inner discussion' did not stop after the exercise – it continues as my conscious mind tries to interpret it and I try and apply it to my current life and circumstances.

• **Amplification of the image**

Von Franz (1998:146) says that the tower is a symbol of both the mother and the stone mandala, and that Jung, who lived in a stone tower on the upper lake of Zurich, saw the Self as the occupant of the tower. The symbolism of the tower also relates to both the Holy Grail and Merlin, the mysterious Mage and magician who instructed the Scottish King, Arthur in “*natural magic*” and assisted him in becoming the leading general of Britain (Hall, 1957:CLXXX). Merlin, who was, according to myth, the child of the devil and an innocent virgin, renounced the evil inclinations he inherited from the devil and became a seer and bringer of health and wholeness (Von Franz, 1998:275). Merlin reportedly retired to live in a tower in a forest and at a very old age disappeared and sealed himself into a great stone vault or tomb, but according to the myth, he still exists as a shadow who communicates at will with mortals (Von Franz, 1998:277; Hall, 1957:CLXXX). Jung (cited in Von Franz, 1998:280) linked Merlin with Mercurius (hence Hermes Trismegistus) by stating that the mysteries and secrets of Merlin were carried on in alchemy “*primarily in the figure of Mercurius. Then Merlin was taken up again in my psychology of the unconscious and – remains uncomprehended to this day!*” Von Franz (1998:278) asserts that Merlin is an archetypal figure. “*He is one of the many figures of pagan anchorites and of Christian forest friars who carry on and keep alive the pattern of fate of the archaic shamans and medicine men*”.

Chevalier & Gheerbrant (1996:1145, 1020, 1021) indicate that the tower may be associated with Mesopotamian ziggurats and The Tower of Babel. Both towers and ziggurats have the symbolic properties of ladders and contact between

'Heaven and earth' and ascension. *"By internalizing the symbol, it might be said that the ascent of the ziggurat corresponds to gradual spiritual cleansing until we reach the pure light of an inner space"* (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996:1146).

The tower as a stone mandala may also relate to the circle or centre which, according to Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996:173) is a fundamental symbol and connotes the beginning of all things and absolute reality. They (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996:173) refer to a quote from Hermes Trismegistus that *"God is a sphere whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere"* meaning that, *"His presence is boundless and universal and that it is therefore at the invisible centre of being unaffected by time or space"*.

Eliade (cited in Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996:173) observes that the symbolism of the circle expresses itself in the 'sacred mountain' where heaven and earth meet and which stands at the centre of the world. Moreover, every temple or palace is assimilated to a 'sacred mountain' and thus becomes a centre and, in turn, become the place through which the 'Axis Mundi' passes - a point of junction between heaven, earth and hell. The circle or 'axis mundi' is hence *"a place of passage, a shrine of initiation"*, and *"the place of highest concentration, the place where decisions are taken, the dividing line"* (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996:173).

The amplification of the image opened up an entirely novel understanding of the interrelated nature of the inner and outer symbols of the Self. It also filled me with an indescribable feeling of excitement and hopefulness that, like Santiago in the 'Alchemist', my inner quest is a 'magical' journey and that the 'soul of the world and universe' speak through my inner 'omens'. It is as though the amplification and association with Merlin and Hermes Trismegistus allow the narration of the inner drama of my existence, my 'symbolic life'. Consequently, the image of the tower represents the circumference of the Self and psyche, the stone mandala. The archetypal figure of Merlin, and hence also Hermes (Mercurius) Trismegistus represent the Self as originator, healer and assistant in the process of individuation and transcendence. The magician or wizard in the process of transformation is thus my Self facilitated through communication which leads to 'Paradise'. It seems apt

since both Hermes (Mercurius) Trismegistis and Merlin are associated with communication between opposites, the conscious and unconscious. Hermes Trismegistus seemed to have featured repeatedly as both an underlying theme of my study and my life at this stage.

The most amazing occurrence during the writing of this self-report is that at some stage I took a break to contemplate the confrontation with the unconscious and a small beautiful bright yellow butterfly briefly landed on my patio and disappeared into the garden. It immediately reminded me of 'The Alchemist' and the shepherd boy at the start of his journey. This was my omen and an indication that somewhere, somehow the soul of the universe is once again confirming its synchronous collaboration on my journey of self-discovery which has only started.

