

Gotthilf Isler

To trust in the own roots

(Lecture on zoom, 18th September 2021 – recording played at C.G. Jung Club of Orange County program on March 13, 2022)

Welcome everybody,

Sunday, June 6th 2021, the Korean Society for Analytical Psychology organized a conference commemorating 60 years after C. G. Jungs death. They asked Hansueli Etter and me to give a lecture on zoom and I promised a short contribution of about 30 minutes. I promised to speak on the most important aspect of Jungian Psychology and suggested as title «To trust in the own roots».

After the lecture I got a thankful letter from the academic director of the Society, Dr. med. Jahyeon Cho, and repeat now this short lecture that I wrote for our Korean friends:

Dear Bou-yong Rhi, dear former analysands, dear friends and colleagues, thank you very much for your invitation.

I promised to tell you something about the most important aspects of Jungian psychology. When I got your invitation, I was enthusiastic and had some thoughts and ideas in my mind. But the more I reflected about the task, the more doubts arose. I know very well, what was important for my own life – I had my dreams and my active imaginations and the interpretations of Marie-Louise von Franz which always helped. But you have all your own life and also your own Korean culture and its difficulties, which is different from my Swiss culture. All my good ideas vanished. The mountain of my doubts grew big and bigger, and I wished to withdraw. In my helplessness I decided to ask the I Ching:

«What do you say to my lecture for Korea? Because I have promised it, I can't withdraw.»

I threw the coins and got no. 8: «Holding Together», changing to no. 45: «Gathering Together».

I had a good feeling: to hold together with my Korean analysands and friends, meeting in the name of C. G. Jung, the «Great Man». But then, I remembered the advice in no. 8: «Inquire of the oracle once again Whether you possess sublimity, constancy, and perseverance; Then there is no blame.»

I felt obliged to repeat the I Ching, threw again the coins and got no. 26: «The Taming Power of the Great» with two bad lines on the first and the second place: «Danger is at Hand. It furthered one to desist» and «The axletrees are taken from the wagon.» I was disappointed and had to wait, and all the doubts came back. And the time until the meeting became shorter and shorter. To get ideas, I read in Jung's Memories and other texts. After some days I made a short Active Imagination: I asked my soul, the Anima:

«Should I cancel my lecture for Korea?»

She answered: «No, on no account!»

I objected, but the car has no axles.

She replied: «Do you think you should go by car, as long as you can go on foot?»

Now I was in trouble indeed. I had only a small hope: Going on foot announced the own way, step by step. Four nights later I had this releasing dream:

I heard organ music, like composed by Johann Sebastian Bach, and in this music came a passage, where a very high single tone was continuously played and never stopped. It was a wonderful divine sound, like a long beaming stick of silver and gold laying high over ground, which hold on, with violins played about. Then I had the visual impression of a short, dark stick with edges, standing in the centre of a wide, concave dish which was filled with rose petals. This stick too emitting the never ending high tone,

the rose petals with the violins. It was so wonderful, that – still in the dream – I had to cry. That a man could compose such a marvellous music ! O Bach !

That was the dream. You see: C. G. Jung is not mentioned in the dream, only the great Johann Sebastian Bach. Jung was not the composer, nor did he do anything. In spite of this I felt that the dream was an answer of my question: «What is most important in Jungian Psychology?»

In his *Memories, in Retrospect*, Jung said:

«When people say I am wise, or a sage, I cannot accept it. A man once dipped a hatful of water from a stream. What did that amount to? I am not that stream. I am at the stream, but I do nothing. Other people are at the same stream, but most of them find they have to do something with it. I do nothing. I never think that I am the one who must see to it that cherries grow on stalks. I stand and behold, admiring what nature can do.

There is an old story about a student who came to a rabbi and said, «In the olden days there were men who saw the face of God. Why don't they any more?» The rabbi replied, «Because nowadays no one can stoop so low.»

One must stoop a little in order to fetch water from the stream.»¹

This statement of Jung is without doubt honest, but I think it is too modest. Countless men took some water from this stream – shamans, founders of religions, mystics, serious artists, also myriads of poor and suffering people praying for help. But Jung realized, that the stream is the mystery of the human psyche, whose centre, the Self, cannot be distinguished from God. And so this stream became – by his superhuman hard work – the basis of his psychology.

This we learned from Jung. He himself brought not back the divine – God or Nature makes grow the cherries. But he experienced in the dreams and in the imaginations the living spirit of the unconscious. He found a way to the stream of

¹ *Memories, Dreams, Reflections by C.G. Jung*. recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffé, translated from the german by Richard and Clara Winston, New York 1989, p. 355.

the human soul, or he rediscovered this way. As you can see in his *Red Book*, he experienced the autonomy of the unconscious by his active imagination, by his totally introvert meditation,. And this is decisive: He took the experience seriously. And with his creativity he opened the way, the access to the stream, to the divine for many of us. He opened for our lifes the door to the eternal. He brought us the antidote against a superficial and provisional enlightenment and cheap rationalism which goes on to destroy, all over the world, all that was spiritually important for mankind in the past.

In my dream, the dish with the rose petals reminds me on our profession: it is like a mandala, a symbol of the self, of totality. Roses are a symbol of love, of Eros, and Eros is a God, a power in life that can be far stronger than our ego-will. Love is often constellated in psychotherapy, we cannot help or heal a suffering individual without a certain amount of love for it. We meet this crucial problem as the problem of transference and countertransference. For Paracelsus love was the supreme basis of medicine. Marie-Louise von Franz saw in a positive transference «the golden bridge» between analyst and analysand, a bridge which is often necessary and helpful, until the client can stand on his own legs, as she said. In his book *The Psychology of the Transference* Jung stated:

The transference «sometimes set the doctor almost insoluble problems or cause him all manner of worries which may go to the limit of the endurable *and even beyond*. Particularly if he has a marked ethical personality and takes his psychological work seriously, this may lead to moral conflicts and divided loyalties whose real or supposed incompatibility has been the occasion of more than one disaster.»²

In our dreams, the messages are not always benevolent. On the contrary, we meet in them also our dark and despised sides and sometimes also the horrible dangers of our time. In my dream, the centre of the dish with the roses was a short sharp-

² C. G. Jung, *The Psychology of the Tranference*, CW 16, § 464.

edged stick. It was nearly black. Because of the roses and the music played around the dish I relate here the blackness to the problems of love and transference. Jung mentioned the disasters in analysis. We all know such accidents. As analysts we are always at risk: either we come too close to a patient, or we are too shy or are not honest or remain too distant out of pure cowardice and hinder a process of individuation. It is not possible to make no mistake, we never are sure. Not long after the beginning of my analysis with Marie-Louise von Franz, she said to me: «You can not individuate with a white collar!» Individuation is following the curved way of a snake where we meet all difficulties which belong to our life. I was with von Franz half a lifetime, and she never gave an advice that was not founded in a dream. There are analysts which think they are more wise than the unconscious and give advices out of books or their own life experience, or they say: C.G.Jung did it in this or that way. Such advices can be helpful for the moment, but they have nothing to do with individuation. In individuation only the revelations of the own unconscious count, they compensate the deficiency of our conscious mind.

But how do you recognise a good analyst? When I was 24 years old, in a difficult situation, I could not find C. G. Jung but met Marie-Louise von Franz by chance. This meeting was one of the most important synchronicities in my life. On the seventieth birthday of Marie-Louise von Franz, I honoured her with a short address:

«Meeting you has fundamentally changed the lives of many people here. I know of many friends whose lives were totally turned about by the encounter with you. One could probably liken what we experience with you to what you experienced with Jung. I personally never knew him ... but I do imagine that your experience of Jung meant much the same to you as our experience of you does to us.

You have led each of us to their own individual truth, to their own Self. And it seems to me that you are able of doing that only because you live this yourself and because what you say to us is totally honestly you....

When one sits with you in a room, then it always has to do directly with the Self, the *numen*, with the indomitable will of God as it is present in dreams or active imagination. And it never has to do directly with something of the ego. Even when sitting together with you, one kneels and you kneel, and the one who is with you kneels as well in front of the Great and Incomprehensible. This forthrightness of human existence vis-à-vis the numinous ... this is the great experience I have of you.»³

It is this modesty and honesty and indeed religious relatedness to the revelations of the unconscious in dreams and imagination, that I have learnt from her. It is a relatedness with many dangers, not least the danger of inflation. But in our time, where all outer authorities and given rules fade away, it is vitally necessary to find the own roots.

Many years ago, after a difficult time, I had a dream in which, at the end, I found in a wood *my tree* – a huge tree with a trunk who had a width of about 3 metres and seemed to reach to heaven, and I laughed and laughed and said again and again; «I have found my tree! I have found my tree!» From high above a liana hanged down, thicker than a leg. I was unspeakably happy, that I found my tree, my roots, my Self. But when I told the dream to von Franz, she was not as enthusiastic as I was. She only said: «Now you have to climb up the liana to the height – this is your work!»

For her and for Jung it was absolutely necessary that we all do our creative work, especially for analysts. Many of us only like to give analysis – this is far more

³ See Emmanuel Kennedy-Xypolitas (Ed.), *The Fountain of the Love of Wisdom. An Homage To Marie-Louise von Franz*. Wilmette, Illinois 2006, p. 83 f. – In extenso (in German): Jungiana, Beiträge zur Psychologie von C. G. Jung. Reihe A, Band 2, Küssnacht 1989, p. 7 f.

agreeable than to do the always very hard creative work. But the dreams – not only my own dreams, usually insist on doing creative work. Think of the enormous struggle and work of C. G. Jung! Creative work is always a hard sacrifice of natural life.⁴

We don't know whether our creative work is any help for the dangerous situation of our world. But the dreams speak of a direct correlation. Once I dreamt, that a bus in which I went was stopped, and this made stop the rotation of the earth. I could see, that all the sunlit parts between the houses remained without moving. At that time, I was blocked in my creative work. Each time when I entered the room for analysis in the house of Marie-Louise von Franz, she greeted me with the words: «How is your book?!» I was not always happy with this question.

Many years ago, an analysand, a Korean doctor who studied at the Jung-Institute Zürich, was worried about a political change in Korea, and he asked himself if he should suspend his studies and go home and help the suppressed students. Then he dreamt a dream that belongs to mankind:

«A huge monster, like a whale, was in the ocean. I saw how the monster swallowed a ship, and I thought it will swallow everything in the world, and will rule the world. I stood on a sandy beach and the monster made rise the water of the ocean, therefore I couldn't stand on the beach anymore. I felt forced to leave and to go somewhere else.

I reached a place with a cave. Some guardians stood in front of the cave door and I explained them why I was here. I entered the cave, there was a small chamber. In this chamber a Zen master received me. He had stayed in this chamber all his life and had meditated. We talked together and he said that he could change the world with his spiritual powers.»

⁴ Cf. Gerhard Adler, *Dynamics of the Self*, London 1979, p. 89 (Letter of C.G. Jung).

That was the dream. Only introversion can bring a solution. I said to the analysand: «What you dreamt is old Eastern wisdom!» «Yes», he said, «I know, but we don't believe in it anymore!» It is the same in the Western world – in our materialistic world we all have lost our trust in spiritual powers. But the unconscious, the unknown maker of our dreams still knows. I think this Zen master would be the wholly individuated man. We could compare him with the well-known Rainmaker from the report of Richard Wilhelm. He had first to put himself in order, and then rain could fall. In our group of Jungians here in Switzerland we often speak of the Rainmaker-principle, that means to be connected with the Self and therefore also have a good effect on the surrounding. The same is shown in the old Chinese tale *The oxen and his herdsman*. The herdsman comes on the market after a long life as an old man. He has forgotten all the search and taming of the ox, he has no shoes, a big belly and is heartily laughing. Without any intention he suddenly makes blossom the dry trees.⁵ Anywhere I have read: Wherever he passed by, the cherry trees blossomed. – C. G. Jung made not blossom the cherry trees, but men. By his humanity, by his human wholeness, he gave them trust into the meaning of their own life. This is the healing effect of a really individuated human being. In Alchemy, the only once produced alchemical gold had the same effect: in the *multiplicatio* it made cheap metals also become gold.

We live in a difficult time in which all the previous spiritual and religious certainty changes. When I wrote my paper on the *Unus mundus*, I dreamt;

«I was standing alone on a somewhat raised edge of an enormous ocean bay. The ocean waters were circling slowly towards the left and at the centre of these circling waters, rather close to the edge where I was standing, a reddish-golden glowing sun had emerged. Further to the left, up in the sky, of an elevated angle of about 30° towards the west, our normal sun could

⁵ *Der Ochs und sein Hirte*. Eine altchinesische Zen-Geschichte. Übersetzt von Kōichi Tsujimura und Hartmund Bucher. Stuttgart, 6. Aufl. 1988, p. 49.

be seen between bands of clouds. The new sun could not be the reflection of the sun in the sky.»

I wrote to this dream:

«In our culture, Christ was the sun, the *lux moderna* of his time. This sun that leans towards the west, the Christian era, the time of the spirit coming from above, is drawing to a close.»

Now I would add: This sun could be the world-wide rationalistic consciousness, the everywhere adored old king, which is coming to an end.

And I wrote: «From out of the ocean, the earth, nature, from the collective unconscious, a new light is dawning, the somewhat reddish sun, perhaps the new principle of consciousness for the next 2000 years. It is being formed by the waters of the ocean's own movement and it will rise without any kind of intervention by mankind. What this new sun will bring, nobody knows. It is a symbol, a new God-image that corresponds to the tendency of the unconscious to increase consciousness. It is a light from below which...will also encompass the darkness of the unknown god. It could be a conscious awareness, the conscious awareness of man become whole who realizes the divinity of all creation, including matter...»⁶

And, as I would add here: It will also include the feminine, the true principle of Eros.

This dream was grace and gave me a great hope for the future of mankind. Following the genii C. G. Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz who went ahead, we all are working on new consciousness, the *Mysterium coniunctionis*, the synthesis of the psychic opposites, step by step, with humbleness and hard work.

⁶ Gotthilf Isler, *Einige Überlegungen zum unus mundus. Die Ganzheit der Welt als Erkenntnisproblem*. In: *Bilder des Unerkennbaren*. Beiträge der Eranostagungen 2007 und 2008. Hrsg. von Erik Hornung und Andreas Schweizer. Basel 2009, p. 192, and in: *Jungiana*, Reihe A, Band 16, Küssnacht 2010, p. 132 f.

It is paradoxical: We must do our work, but we can not do it ourselves. We are only a kind of midwife for the birth of the new sun.

I thank you.

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