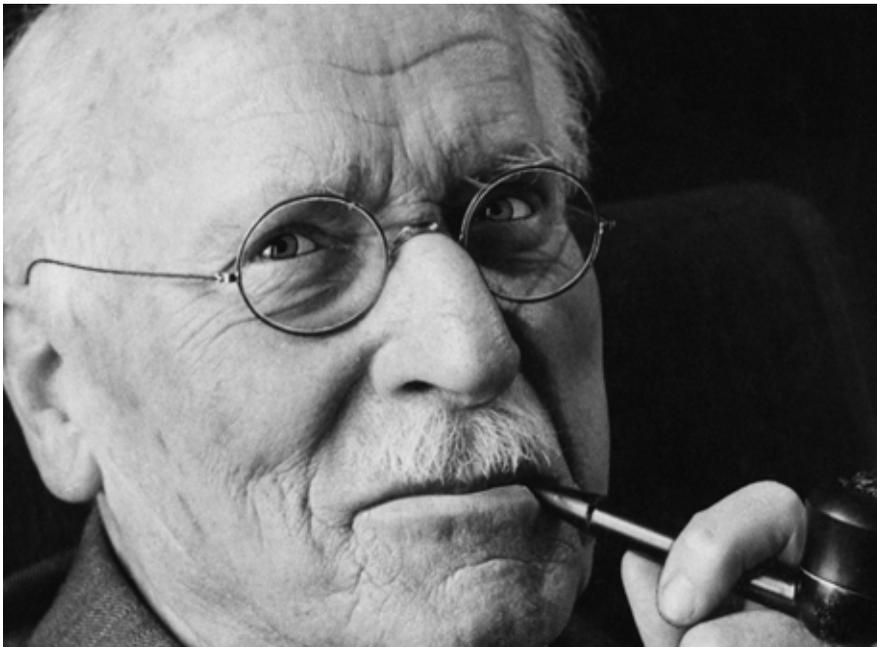


Academic Article

A Simulated Interview with Carl Jung: Part 2 – Learning to Channel Mental Energy

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interest in the struggles that often develop during the mid-life period. Finally, Jung confronted issues related to the treatment of trauma, as differentiated from sensitive topics that might arouse strong emotional reactions in a client. Several useful aspects of Analytical Psychology are discussed in a simulated interview with Carl Gustav Jung (CGJ) led by James C. Overholser (JCO).

JCO: Thank you for meeting with me again. Maybe we can start with your ideas about mental energy.

CGJ: “Yes, absolutely” (Jung, 1968, p. 30). “That was the subject I really wanted to tell you about today” (Jung, 1968, p. 190). “All psychological phenomena can be considered as manifestations of energy ... this energy is conceived as desire. I call it libido ... which is by no means only sexual” (Jung, 1961, p. 247). “Libido for me means psychic energy” (Jung, 1953, p. 52).

JCO: Where does this psychic energy come from?

CGJ: “In the psyche as in nature, a tension of opposites creates a potential which may express itself at any time in a manifestation of energy” (Jung, 1970b, p. 414). “There is no energy unless there is a tension of opposites” (Jung in Storr, 1983, 159). “The greater the tension between the pairs of opposites, the greater will be the energy that comes from them” (Jung, 1969b, p. 26).

JCO: What kind of opposites?

CGJ: “In the unconscious of every man there is a hidden feminine personality, and in that of every woman a masculine personality” (Jung, 1969a, p. 284). “I have called

Introduction

Carl Jung has provided some interesting ideas about mental energy and how it can be understood, directed, and used in therapy. Partly deriving from Jung’s friendship with famed physicist Wolfgang Pauli, Jung relied on the laws of thermodynamics to guide new ideas about mental and emotional energy. The law of conservation of energy claims that energy cannot be created nor destroyed, only changed. The law of entropy states that energy gets distributed evenly, striving for

a balance throughout a system. Jung extrapolated from these principles to shape his views of mental energy. Jung continued to explore dreams as a strategy for maintaining balance within the psyche, with energy continually being exchanged across the conscious and unconscious spheres.

Jung pioneered the notion of a *complex* as an unresolved issue that triggers strong emotional reactions. In addition, Jung examined personality development across the lifespan, with a special

this masculine element in woman the animus and the corresponding feminine element in man the anima" (Jung, 1953, p. 88).

JCO: Are there other opposite qualities that seem relevant?

CGJ: "Of course" (Jung, 1955, p. 84). "There are all kinds of opposites: dry-wet, hot-cold, male-female" (Jung, 1940, p. 242). "No man is simply introverted or simply extraverted, but has both attitudes potentially in him (Jung in Storr, 1983, p. 161). "Everyone possesses both mechanisms, extraversion as well as introversion, and only the relative predominance of one or the other determines the type" (Jung, 1971, p. 4). "The two types therefore seem created for a symbiosis" (Jung in Storr, 1983, p. 161). "An introvert marries an extrovert for compensation" (Jung in Evans, 1964, p. 71).

JCO: What do you mean by compensation?

CGJ: "Any one-sidedness of the conscious mind, or a disturbance of the psychic equilibrium, elicits a compensation from the unconscious" (Jung, 1969a, p. 520). "It is much better for the conscious and unconscious to be connected and to move on parallel lines" (Jung, 1955, p. 209). "Compensation aims at establishing a normal psychological balance and thus appears as a kind of self-regulation of the psychic system" (Jung, 1969b, p. 288). "Compensation ... is an intelligent choice of means aiming not only at the restoration of the psychic equilibrium but at an advance toward wholeness" (Jung, 1955, p. 621).

JCO: So people aim for psychic equilibrium?

CGJ: "The psyche is a self-regulating system that maintains its equilibrium just as the body does. Every process that goes too far immediately and inevitably calls forth compensation (Jung, 1954, p. 153). "There is no balance, no system of self-regulation, without opposition" (Jung, 1953, p. 60).

JCO: I am still confused about how mental energy is regulated.

CGJ: "Just as man has succeeded in inventing a turbine, and by conducting a flow of water to it, in transforming the latter's kinetic energy into electricity capable of manifold applications, so he has succeeded, with the help of a psychic mechanism, in converting natural instincts ... into other dynamic forms that are productive of work ... Just as a power-station imitates a waterfall and thereby gains possession of its energy, so the psychic mechanism imitates the instinct" (Jung, 1969b, p. 42). "Do you understand that? (Jung, 2001, p. 193).

JCO: So psychic energy is converted from one use to a different purpose?

CGJ: "No psychic value can disappear without being replaced by another of equivalent intensity" (Jung, 1970b, p. 86). "The analogy with the law of the conservation of energy is very close" (Jung, 1913, p. 27).

JCO: and these transformations shift the person's mental energy?

CGJ: "Progression might be compared to a watercourse that flows from a mountain into a valley. The damming up of libido is analogous to a specific obstruction in the direction of the flow ... which transforms the kinetic energy of the

flow into the potential energy of a reservoir. Thus dammed back, the water is forced into another channel ... transformed into electricity by means of a turbine" (Jung, 1969b, p. 38). "Every time we see a person who ... has ... some exaggerated mental attitude, we know here is too much libido, and the excess must have been taken away from somewhere else where there is too little" (Jung, 1913, p. 27). "The less libido he gives to reality, the more exaggerated will be his phantasies, and the more he will be cut off from the world" (Jung, 1914a, p. 423).

JCO: What happens if the path to transform energy becomes blocked?

CGJ: "As the way to adaptation is blocked, the biological energy we call libido does not find its appropriate outlet or activity, with the result that a suitable form of adaptation is replaced by an abnormal or primitive one" (Jung, in Storr, 1983, p. 52). "The outbreak of neurosis is just not a matter of chance It is usually the moment when a new psychological adjustment, that is, a new adaptation, is demanded" (Jung in Storr, 1983, p. 49). "Neurosis itself, can be formulated as an act of adaptation that has failed" (Jung in Storr, 1983, p. 53). "The repression of one of the opposites lends only to a prolongation and extension of the conflict, in other words, to a neurosis. The therapist therefore confronts the opposites with one another and aims at uniting them permanently" (Jung, 1970a, p. xv).

JCO: So the psyche works to restore balance in the psyche?

CGJ: "You can put it like that" (Jung, 1955, p. 28). "Neurosis is really

an attempt at self-cure, just as any physical disease is part an attempt at self-cure ... It is exactly the same with neurosis. It is an attempt of the self-regulating psychic system to restore the balance" (Jung, 1968, p. 169). "The symptomatology of an illness is at the same time a natural attempt at healing" (Jung, 1969b, p. 149).

JCO: I often encourage my clients to aim for a balanced lifestyle. Do you agree?

CGJ: "Oh yes, most definitely" (Jung in McGuire & Hull, 1977, p. 206). "Impulse and counter-impulse, positive and negative, should reach a state of regular interaction and mutual influence. This balancing and combining of pairs of opposites can be seen, for instance, in the process of reflection that precedes a difficult decision" (Jung, 1955, p. 33).

JCO: When starting therapy with a new client, what is your usual goal?

CGJ: "My aim is to bring about a psychic state in which my patient begins to experiment with his nature" (Jung, 1982, p. 84). "The analyst has to establish a relationship with both halves of his patient's personality, because only from them can he put together a whole and complete man, and not merely from one half by suppression of the other half" (Jung in Storr, 1983, p. 385). "My principle is: for heaven's sake do not be perfect, but by all means try to be complete" (Jung, 1968, p. 98).

JCO: What does it mean to be complete?

CGJ: "Wholeness consists in the union of the conscious and unconscious personality" (Jung, 1969a, p. 175).

“The greatest and most important problems of life are all in a certain sense insoluble ... They can never be solved, but only outgrown”

(Jung, 1962, pp. 91-92)

JCO: What makes a person become neurotic?

CGJ: "I know exactly how I could make myself neurotic: if I said or believed something that is not myself. I say what I see, and if somebody agrees with me it pleases me and if nobody agrees it is indifferent to me" (Jung, 1968, p. 126). "The aim of individuation is to divest the self of the false wrapping of the persona" (Jung, 1953, p. 172).

JCO: What do you mean by individuation?

CGJ: "I will try to explain the term 'individuation' as simply as possible. By it I mean the psychological process that makes a human being an 'individual' - a unique, indivisible unit or a 'whole man'" (Jung, 1940, p. 3). "Individuation ... implies becoming one's self" (Jung, 1953, p. 171). "The aim of individuation is nothing less than to divest the self of the false wrappings of the persona on the one hand, and of the suggestive power of primordial images on the other" (Jung, 1990, p. 116). "So long as the persona exists, individuality is repressed" (Jung, 1953, p. 285).

JCO: Is there another principle for understanding mental energy?

CGJ: "Yes, certainly" (Jung in Evans,

1964, p. 82). "The principle of entropy. Transformations of energy are possible only as a result of differences in intensity ... A closed energetic system gradually reduces its differences in intensity to an even temperature" (Jung, 1969b, p. 25). "Any one-sidedness of the conscious mind, or a disturbance of the psychic equilibrium, elicits a compensation from the unconscious" (Jung, 1969a, p. 520). "The psychic equilibrium of the neurotic is disturbed" (Jung, 1954, p. 175).

JCO: Why do you focus on personality development in adulthood?

CGJ: "The integration of the self is a fundamental problem which arises in the second half of life" (Jung, 1954, p. 264). "The greatest and most important problems of life are all in a certain sense insoluble ... They can never be solved, but only outgrown" (Jung, 1962, pp. 91-92). "For these reasons, I no longer seek the cause of a neurosis in the past, but in the present. I ask, what is the necessary task which the patient will not accomplish?" (Jung in Storr, 1983, p. 52). "The task of psychotherapy is the improvement of the conscious attitude and not a far-reaching analysis of infantile memories" (Jung, 1930, p. 350). "It is of course impossible to free oneself from one's childhood without devoting a great deal of work to it ... Nor can it be achieved through intellectual knowledge only; what is alone effective is remembering that is also re-experiencing" (Jung in Stein, 1982, p. 37).

JCO: How does this relate to mental health?

CGJ: "Neurosis is a disturbance of the development of personality"

(Jung, 1940, p. 301). "Most neuroses are misdevelopments that have been built up over many years, and these cannot be remedied by a short and intensive process" (Jung, 1954, p. 24). "Our personality develops in the course of our life ... At first we do not know what deeds or misdeeds, what destiny, what good and evil we have in us" (Jung in Zweig & Wolf, 1997, p. 281). "Personality is a seed that can only develop by slow stages throughout life" (Jung in Storr, 1983, p. 194). "The symptoms of neurosis ... are seeds that fail to sprout owing to the inclement conditions of inner and outer nature" (Jung in Storr, 1983, p. 152).

JCO: Shouldn't people outgrow neurotic tendencies as they get older and wiser?

CGJ: "The wine of youth does not always clear with advancing age; oftentimes it grows turbid" (Jung, 1933, p. 120). "Many people ... approach the threshold of old age with unsatisfied claims which inevitably turn their glances backward" (Jung, 1933, p. 127). "The achievements which society rewards are won at the cost of a diminution of personality" (Jung, 1933, pp. 119-120).

JCO: Why do some clients seem to reject their biological age and behave in an immature manner?

CGJ: "As the formerly neurotic could not escape from childhood, so now he cannot part with his youth" (Jung, 1933, p. 121). "For a young person it is almost a sin, or at least a danger, to be too preoccupied with himself, but for an aging person it is a duty and a necessity to devote serious attention to himself" (Jung, 1969b, p. 399). "To the man in the second half of life, the development of the function

“Complicated, highly conscious persons – are so firmly anchored in consciousness that nothing can pry them loose... they want to talk with the doctor on the conscious plane and go into a rational explanation and discussion of their difficulties”

(Jung, 1954, p. 60, para 137)

of opposites lying dormant in the unconscious means renewal" (Jung in Storr, 1983, p. 166). "The union of opposites through the middle path ... is ... the most legitimate fulfillment of the meaning of the individual's life" (Jung, 1953, p. 203).

JCO: But with old age comes thoughts of death.

CGJ: "I think it is better for an old person to live on, to look forward to the next day, as if he had to spend centuries, and then he lives properly. But when he is afraid, when he doesn't look forward, he looks back, he petrifies, he gets stiff and he dies before his time, but when he's living and looking forward to the great adventure that is ahead, then he lives" (Jung in McGuire & Hull, 1977, p. 438).

JCO: As I approach my own retirement, should I be working on myself?

CGJ: "Yes, absolutely" (Jung, 1968, p. 30). "The afternoon of human life must also have a significance of its own and cannot be merely a pitiful appendage to life's morning" (Jung, 1969b, p. 399). "About a third of my cases are not suffering from

any clinically definable neurosis, but from the senselessness and aimlessness of their lives" (Jung, 1954, p. 41). "A man who after forty years has not reached that position in life which he had dreamed of is easily the prey of disappointment" (Jung in McGuire & Hull, 1977, p. 106).

JCO: You feel that midlife struggles are normal, natural and helpful?

CGJ: "That is true" (Jung, 1955, p. 48). "Statistics show a rise in frequency in mental depressions in men about forty ... We see that in this phase of life - between thirty-five and forty - an important change in the human psyche is in preparation ... Often it is something like a slow change in a person's character" (Jung in Storr, 1983, p. 72). "With the beginning of your life's second part, inexorably a change imposes itself, subtly at first but with ever-increasing weight. Whatever you have acquired hitherto is no longer the same as you regarded it when it still lay before you - it has lost all of its charm, its splendor and its attractiveness. What was once an adventurous effort has become routine" (Jung in McGuire & Hull, 1977, p. 446). "One's previous inclinations and interests begin to weaken and others take their place ... one's cherished convictions and principles, especially the moral ones, begin to harden and begin to grow increasingly rigid" (Jung in Storr, 1983, p. 73).

JCO: How does a therapist promote healthy aging?

CGJ: "Now, that is a very difficult question" (Jung in McGuire & Hull, 1977, p. 257). "One is confronted with the difficult task of creating a new goal for an aging life. If one has nothing to look forward to except

the habitual things, life cannot renew itself anymore. It gets stale, it congeals and petrifies” (Jung in McGuire & Hull, 1977, pp. 446-447). “In the second part of life you begin to question yourself ... ‘What is the goal?’ and next, ‘Where are you going now?’” (Jung in McGuire & Hull, 1977, p. 106). “Man cannot stand a meaningless life” (Jung in McGuire & Hull, 1977, p. 439).

JCO: I have a middle-aged male client who seems to cling to his youth, dressing in youthful clothes and engaging in youthful activities. Do you see a problem with this?

CGJ: “Oh yes, very much so” (Jung, in McGuire & Hull, 1977, p. 266). “His neurosis comes mainly from his clinging to a youthful attitude that is now out of season” (Jung, 1982, p. 78). “He cannot part with his youth. He shirks from the grey thoughts of approaching age, and, feeling the prospect before him unbearable, is always straining to look behind him ... so the grown man shirks back from the second half of life” (Jung in Storr, 1983, p. 74). “Nothing is more ridiculous or inept than elderly people pretending to be young - they lose their dignity, the one prerogative of age” (Jung in McGuire & Hull, 1977, pp. 447-448). “An old man who cannot bid farewell to life appears as feeble and sickly as a young man who is unable to embrace it” (Jung, 1933, pp. 128-129). “They want to carry the psychology of the youthful phase over the threshold of the so-called years of discretion ... who does not know those touching old gentlemen ... who can fan the flame of life only by reminiscences of their heroic youth” (Jung, 1933, p. 121). “It is better to go forward with the stream of time than backwards against it” (Jung, 1933, p. 128).

JCO: My client is proud to maintain his youthful attitude and carefree lifestyle.

CGJ: “In the adult there is a hidden child - an eternal child, something that is always becoming, is never completed, and that calls for unceasing care, attention, and fostering” (Jung, 1940, p. 284). “We do not help the neurotic patient by freeing him from the demand made by civilization ... the suffering that comes from useful work, and from victory over real difficulties, brings with it those moments of peace and satisfaction” (Jung, 1915, p. 259). “He will now recognize the inescapable truth that to make claims on others is a childish self-indulgence that must be replaced by a greater sense of his own responsibility” (Jung, 1933, p. 49).

JCO: How can I help people during times of crisis or loss?

CGJ: “Remember a meaningful life never excludes suffering” (Jung, in Sands, 1961, p. 140). “Man needs difficulties; they are necessary for health. What concerns us here is only an excessive amount of them” (Jung, 1969b, p. 73).

JCO: So how do you treat trauma patients?

CGJ: “It is really quite simple to explain” (Jung, 1968, p. 44). “We all know that a man feels a compelling need to recount a vivid experience again and again until it has lost its affective value ... The unbosoming gradually depotentiates the affectivity of the traumatic experience until it no longer has a disturbing influence” (Jung, 1954, p. 131). “But there is nothing new about it. Practically everybody knows it” (Jung, 1940, p. 21).

JCO: So treatment relies on the client describing the traumatic events over and over?

CGJ: “Things are not quite so simple as that” (Jung, 1953, p. 27). “Abreaction by itself is not sufficient” (Jung, 1954, p. 133). “Mere rehearsal of the experience does not itself possess a curative effect: the experience must be rehearsed in the presence of the doctor ... when he can confide his experience to an understanding and sympathetic doctor ... no longer does he stand alone in his battle ... but someone whom he trusts reaches out a hand, lending him moral strength to combat the tyranny of uncontrolled emotion” (Jung, 1954, p. 132).

JCO: Some of my clients have suffered from severe negative life events?

CGJ: “The intensity of the trauma has very little pathogenic significance in itself, but it must have a special significance for the patient” (Jung, 1953, p. 13). “Life does not come from events, but from us ... We create the meaning of events ... Events have no meaning” (Jung, 2009, p. 239). “Everybody who is born has undergone that trauma, so the word has lost its meaning” (Jung, in Evans, 1964, p. 42). “These traumata ... are secondary phenomena, the outcome of an attitude that is already neurotic” (Jung, 1954, p. 129). “The trauma is either a single, definite, violent impact, or a complex of ideas and emotions which may be likened to a psychic wound. Everything that touches this complex, however slightly, excites a vehement reaction, a regular emotional explosion. Hence one could easily represent the trauma as a complex with a high emotional charge”

(Jung, 1954, p. 130). “As soon as a neurosis is present it is a sign of a special heaping up of energy in the unconscious, like a charge that may explode” (Jung, 1953, p. 112).

JCO: Is a complex like a really sensitive issue?

CGJ: “Call it sensitiveness or whatever you like, this unknown element of predisposition is in every case of neurosis” (Jung, 1914b, p. 284). “A complex would not be a complex at all if it did not possess a certain, even a considerable, affective intensity” (Jung, 1969b, p. 11, footnote 19). “Complexes are the tender spots of the psyche, which react most quickly to an external stimulus or disturbance” (Jung, 1964, p. 28). “Certain complexes arise on account of painful or distressing experiences in a person’s life, experiences of an emotional nature which leave lasting psychic wounds behind them” (Jung, 1969b, p. 313). “They are vulnerable points which we

do not like to remember and still less to be reminded of by others ... they indicate the unresolved problems of the individual” (Jung, 1933, p. 91). “One should never be influenced too much by the surface appearance of the symptoms ... A more thorough investigation will almost invariably show that some morbid tendency existed long before the appearance of clinical symptoms” (Jung, 1954, p. 130). “Complexes ... can temporarily obsess consciousness, or influence speech and action in an unconscious way” (Jung, 1963, p. 394).

JCO: How can a therapist deal with a complex?

CGJ: “The complex is not under control of the will ... it forces itself tyrannically upon the conscious mind” (Jung, 1966, pp. 131). “A complex becomes pathological only when we think we have not got it” (Jung, 1954, p. 79). “When the complex is made conscious ... the patient will exclaim with relief: ‘So

that’s what the trouble was!’ the symptoms disappear, the complex is ... resolved” (Jung, 1969b, p. 368).

JCO: Maybe we can take a break. Can we continue our discussion next week?

CGJ: “I would be delighted to see you again” (Jung in McGuire, 1974, p. 364). “Would it be possible for you to come to Küsnacht next Saturday?” (Jung in Meier, 2001, p. 68).

JCO: Certainly. Thank you. 

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