



The Alchemy of Symbols

Module 5: the symbolic life

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The Symbolic Life

'To see a World in a Grain of Sand

And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,

Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand

And Eternity in an hour.'

William Blake, Auguries of Innocence

We have arrived at the last section in this course. The weeks have gone past very quickly and perhaps you did not get the chance to listen or read all the transcripts or complete all the applications. Please ensure that you download all the pdf documents. These contain the transcripts of the podcasts and the applications so that you can revisit the course content whenever you feel the need.

This module will focus on what it means to live a symbolic life, how to implement it and how to use this method to actualize your own individuation.

The application for this week will explore awareness and implementation of symbol work into your daily life.

A summary of what you have learnt to date

During the past four weeks, you were introduced to the methodology of working with your symbols. The initial two weeks focused on making your existing symbols conscious, and



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allowing the meaning of these symbols to emerge. The last two weeks enabled you bring into consciousness un-symbolised content and allowed the unconscious to symbolise it.

To recap what you have learnt during the last four weeks, I would like to mention the following points.

- Symbols contain all that you believe, understand, hope for, desire, repress and suppress. Working with symbols will allow you to communicate with your unconscious and unleash untapped potential.
- Symbols are the tools of exploration that you need to journey inward, into your personal universe.
- Symbols offer the promise of liberation from repression and unconscious influences.
- Symbols contain the seeds of latent talents.
- Symbols contain your truth hidden within the deepest parts of your psyche.
- Working with symbols will teach you the process of becoming and living consciously.
- Symbols will help you understand and resolve conflict situations.
- Symbols will help you set goals and bring about the best, most appropriate solution.
- Working with symbols will add depth and meaning to your life. It will change the way you relate to yourself and the world around you.
- Working with symbols is a creative, energising and inspirational pursuit. It contains the truth about who you are and offer liberation from a superficial, one dimensional existence.

But most of all, working with symbols with reconnect you with your soul.



What is the symbolic life?

The symbolic life involves working in consciousness with your symbols in order to recognise the true meaning, essence and telos of who you are. It further allows you to individuate, by being finely attuned and receptive to your symbolic attractors which map your own mythological journey.

To fully enter and embrace the symbolic life means letting go of the tyranny of reductive literalization. It is acquiring the capacity for mystical, poetic and symbolic vision, wherein the rich and abundant imaginal¹ world at times trapped in the soul (the unconscious psyche) is liberated. It means breaking its bonds enveloping the literal and infusing it with life, beauty, meaning and pathos.

The symbolic life is an attitude, an approach to accessing the magic and meaning in one's private world. It involves the use of all previous four functions and combines it to create your personal myth and imbue your world with synchronicity, symbols, wonder and joy.

This dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious is essential for psychological health. The symbolic life requires you to play with your reality, the stories you tell and the attitude you hold. A healthy psyche is fluid and in motion. The symbolic life resists entropy and stagnation by breathing new life into your world. We are constantly changing our relatedness to the world and to ourselves; and we often find ourselves having an attitude and perspective that is no longer valid. The symbolic life is an approach which actively resists this entropy through communication with the unconscious.

The symbolic life is about changing your experience and expression in the world to one of courage and inspiration, choosing who you want to be and how you express yourself.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active_imagination



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Rudolf Steiner² said that man must complete him/herself. This is what the symbolic life is all about and I will share with you what this means in terms of individuation, creating meaning and communicating with your soul.

Jung's relationship with his own symbols

Jung was the father of Analytical Psychology. Not only was he the great cartographer of the psyche he was also interested in man's soul. His work and writings focused on the development of the soul; he believed that living a meaningful life involved communication with our unconscious; the acknowledgment of our religious instinct and the need for our life to be meaningful. In his book *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* Jung states:

'The least of things with a meaning is worth more in life than the greatest of things without it.'

Symbols reflect and contain the unknown qualities of our experiences. Relating to your symbols and becoming conscious of their meaning will unlock a new dimension of viewing and experiencing your life and your world. Symbols hold within them secrets and the promise of a new life.

Creativity in the symbolic life

Jung's work is the inspiration behind creative therapies, including play therapy, art therapy, dance therapy amongst others. Jung believed that the psyche's natural inclination is to be

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Steiner



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healed and live in balance through creating a bridge of communication between the conscious personality and the unconscious. This bridge is symbol work, through which the individual is able to become whole and individuated.

‘From the living fountain of instinct flows everything that is creative; hence the unconscious is not merely conditioned by history, but is the very source of the creative impulse.’

Carl Gustav Jung, Volume 8, par. 339

Jung himself was an artist. He wrote and illustrated central work in his oeuvre, the [Red Book](#) between the ages of 40 and 65. This book comments and recounts imaginative experiences and reflects on manuscripts he had written. It is beautifully written in German, Latin and Greek, using calligraphic pen, multi-coloured ink and gouache paint. The text is accompanied with colourful mandalas and dream-like landscapes and images. The book relays his experiences of communicating with the unconscious and it is a reflection of a dialogue between Jung and his unconscious.

He was guided throughout his life by many powerful symbols. One of these symbols were stones. Since Jung was a child, stones had a symbolic meaning to him. He writes in *Man and his symbols*:

‘The stone symbolized something permanent that can never be lost or dissolved, something eternal that some have compared to the mystical experience of God within one’s own soul.

It symbolizes what is perhaps the simplest and deepest experience, the experience of something eternal that man can have in those moments when he feels immortal and unalterable.’



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The power of this symbol inspired Jung to build a sanctuary next to Lake Zurich, the Bollingen Tower. Here he spent many days inscribing stones with Latin quotes and images. Just days before his death in 1961, at the age of eighty-six, he dreamt of a great white stone. On it was the inscription 'This shall be a sign unto you of wholeness and oneness.'

The Symbolic Life is using the tools of creativity in order to manifest yourself and your destiny. The path of individuation is one of creativity, imagination and passion.

Individuation

The Jungian journey towards wholeness, meaning and psychological health is an inward journey. This is achieved through reflection and engaging with the images and objects that capture who you are, both consciously and unconsciously, in other words, the whole you. Your personal symbols contain all of who you are and could be.

The symbolic life dares to look beyond the veil of reality; allowing the magic of being you to unfold itself.

To quote Jung:

'... no wonder people get neurotic. Life is too rational, there is no symbolic existence in which I am something else, in which I am fulfilling my role, my role as one of the actors in the divine drama of life.'

Carl Gustav Jung, Volume 18, par. 628

The real science and art of the process is to discover one's own symbols, to examine one's personal myth, or unique, personal mythology. This process is called individuation and is the discovery of the unique value that one brings to this world. Personal mythological stories are



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revealed through symbols and images. The dreams of individuals are filled with archetypal and objective images. The goal and real value lies in trying to understand the dreamer's own association with the images. Collective symbols such as art or religious icons do not only have meaning which is collectively understood, it also has personal and subjective meaning. The questions to be asked are; what are the images and the symbols that speak to you and what does these images reveal of what lives in your soul?

In your search for personal symbols, coming to terms with your own stock of imaginal content, you would look at images that are significant to you. These are the images that animate and draw you into their sphere of influence. They speak to you, evoking an emotional or spiritual response, driving you to experience a movement in your soul by virtue of this image. These are images that you find fascinating. These images is is what Jung called numinous; awe-inspiring and indicating the presence of the divine.

A characteristic of Jung's psychology is that he was less interested in the developmental causal history of how a person came to be as they are, than in where they were going, what drove them and what lay in their future. Without dismissing the developmental aspect, he had a teleological view of psychology, being more interested in how things could unfold. The idea is that the symbol has a teleological character pointing towards the future.

To quote Jung:

'Alchemy ideas are expressed almost entirely in an extraordinarily rich symbolism. The help which alchemy affords us in understanding the symbols of the individuation process is, in my opinion, of the utmost importance.'

Carl Gustav. Jung, Volume 16, par. 220

With the tool of symbolisation, we are able to raise and recognise the world around us and within us, as something beautiful, something sublime, filled with wonder and magic. We are able to reclaim the sovereign right of our perceptive faculty, such that it is not wholly



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dominated by the imposed external meanings, often inauthentic to us. Through this process we are able to reconnect with the numinous, soul-filled world, allowing meaning to re-enter our lives.

Jung said that we yearn for meaning to escape the awful, grinding banal life where we are reduced to 'nothing but'. He further stated that the only thing that makes this life something worth living, something sublime and meaningful, which raises our experience above the prosaic and reductive, is learning to see the world symbolically.

To quote Jung:

'That gives peace, when people feel that they are living the Symbolic Life, that they are actors in the divine drama. That gives the only meaning to human life; everything else is banal and you can dismiss it. A career, producing children, are all maya compared with that one thing, that your life is meaningful.'

Carl Gustav Jung, Volume 18, par. 630

With this quote, we have come to the end of our journey on the Alchemy of Symbols course.

Please refer to the applications next for guidelines on living the symbolic life and implementing the shift to live between the imaginary and the real, the subjective and the objective.

We need to give attention to the role of the ego in the symbolic life. The Jungian Ego is the centre of the psyche and the conductor of your life. The play between imaginary and real, fact and fiction, objective and subjective is regulated by the ego. As you become aware of the unconscious content contained in your symbols, your consciousness will expand and the ego will grow stronger. Your ability to be fluid increases. To allow the conscious ego perspective to be one-sided and aligned with one perspective is the antithesis of the symbolic life. Always entertain the opposite perspective to any given situation in consciousness and make provision for the precious gift of doubt. This allows for the soul's language to be heard and engaged in consciousness.



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My wish for you is that you move forward in your life with new purpose, meaning, understanding and compassion for yourself. You are truly unique, and working with symbols will help you unfold your potential and expand your personality.

Thank you for joining me in this journey and making it possible to share this process with you.

All the best.

Anja



Module 5: applications

The applications for this week will bring the Symbols in your life into your conscious sphere. The past four weeks focused on interacting with symbols in the imaginative sphere and this week we will use play and imagination to bring the Symbolic Life alive.

Application A

Engage with your environment for thirty minutes per day and experience it as if you are having a lucid dream. Practice this in various environments and settings. This is similar to mindfulness; in the sense that you must allow yourself to be aware of everything around you and within you. It is a difficult exercise, so try to practice it as much as you can. It is really an attitude more than an ability, so don't be too hard on yourself if your mind wanders and you forget, just bring yourself back and carry on.

Take note of what you see, what you hear and what you think in relation to what enters your awareness. Reflect on these as if they are symbols.

I will share an example of something I read: If you are walking on a beach and find some items on the sand (it could be shells or rubble and so forth) reflect on the symbolic meaning of these objects and why they are entering your awareness.



Application B

Create a symbol tray for yourself. If you have a situation or issue that you are dealing with, select items from your environment that symbolise aspects of the issue and place these on a tray (or a special space that you can allocate for it). For example, if you have identified an issue during the course through the symbol work, then find items that capture your symbols from that application and place them on this tray. Once you have all the items, play with them and arrange them until it feels right. Then reflect on what the relationship of the items to each other mean. Take note of the spaces, direction and meaning of the symbols to each other. Look at this symbol tray daily and add or take away items you feel should be moved. Do this until there is a shift in the situation one that you are willing to accept. You can then put away your items and start a new symbols tray.

Application C

Start taking note of the symbols in your dreams and fantasies, as well as the symbols that come to you through symbol work, and start looking for those symbols in your daily experience. Include images or content that you come across which mirror your symbols; objects that you see around you, things that people say in conversation, etc. Take note of these synchronicities and know that your unconscious, your soul, is hearing you and communicating with you.

These are the applications for the fifth module, and the last week in our Alchemy of Symbols course.



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Please take some time to reflect on the forum and share your experiences and thoughts about the course. I would love to receive some feedback.

All the best

Anja