



Module 3

MAYA'S LABYRINTH

The Heroes and Villains Within



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THE CENTRE FOR APPLIED JUNGIAN STUDIES

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THE CONSCIOUS PURSUIT OF AVERAGE

Beginning early in our childhood development, we find where the line is between what is socially “acceptable” and “unacceptable”, and we spend the rest of our lives trying to toe the line. Desperately wanting to fit in during childhood and adolescence, we seek the middle, and everything within us that doesn't fit gets rejected and then projected out onto others. First, we reject, then we project.

Jung was amongst the first to notice that we willy-nilly cast out our own unacknowledged mistakes and blind spots as well as the best parts of ourselves—our greatest potential and possibilities—onto other people through projection. We strive to become, in a sense, “normal,” average. The last thing we want is to be excommunicated from the rest of our tribe. So, in order to avoid being cast out, we do whatever it takes to fit in and begin cutting off and rejecting parts of ourselves, rejecting any trait, characteristic or talent that fails to find acceptance and approval from our parents, our family, our teachers and our friends. A family that values academia and rejects the arts will have our inner artist go into hiding. A family that values an active lifestyle and sports accomplishment might see our inner philosopher go into hiding and so on. In much the same way we dis-identify with our anger, envy, pettiness, rage, jealousies, etc.

Seeing in others what we won't admit also lies within, is what Jung calls “**projection.**” Although our conscious mind is avoiding our own flaws, or our gold, it still wants to deal with them on a deeper level, so we magnify those flaws or attributes in others. This is a

normal part of life; however, psychological growth and maturity depend on becoming aware of—or in other words—bringing to consciousness when, how and what we have projected out, and in this way reclaiming our wholeness.

SEEKING WHAT HAS BEEN REJECTED

Mythologically, the hero's goal is to find the treasure, the princess, the ring, the golden egg, elixir of life, etc. Psychologically, these are metaphors for one's true feelings and unique potential. In the process of individuation, the heroic task is to assimilate unconscious contents as opposed to being overwhelmed by them. The potential result is the release of energy that has been tied up with unconscious parts of ourselves. Jung called these parts complexes.

It is through the complexes that we manage to approach the unconscious without being overwhelmed and engulfed by it. In the same way, it is through complexes that the unconscious approaches us. In Jung's words:

“Complexes are in truth the living units of the unconscious psyche, and it is only through them that we are able to deduce its existence and its constitution.” [CW 8, par. 210]

To this end we need complexes, for they are the path and the vessel that give shape and structure to archetypal patterns as they unfold in personal experience.

Complexes provide the link between the archetype and the ego, enabling the transformation of the archetypal into the personal. The complex is thus messenger of the gods, rather than the ego.

A complex that can be integrated into an individual's evolving consciousness enables the ego to expand and the ego boundaries become more flexible. This is the teleological, purposeful task of the complex. Let's then retrieve what has been rejected and projected and bring it home.

THE HEROES WITHIN

All of us have a tremendous richness within us—potential that, when tapped, can help us find great success and fulfillment in our lives. But we suppress our inner greatness and cast it 'out there' projecting these qualities out into the world and onto others, so that they can carry them for us, because somewhere along the way we've deemed ourselves unworthy of embodying it. As Marianne Williamson so beautifully describes it:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our Light, not our Darkness, that most frightens us.”

We project our dreams, our gold, all the beauty we refuse to see and accept within ourselves onto the beautiful faces and characters we see in the movies, on TV and onto

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our favorite athletes, talk show hosts, entrepreneurs, authors, lovers, friends and so on. These “heroes” in our lives—the people we admire, the people we love, the people we envy—carry our projections, exemplify our cherished values, display qualities we admire, show us how to overcome our challenges.

We project our gold onto someone, and suddenly we're consumed with that person. The first inkling of this is when the other person appears to be so luminous that he (or she) glows in the dark. That's a sure sign that something is changing in us, and we are projecting our gold onto the other person. As we withdraw our projections, claiming what is ours, a part of us that has been hidden emerges, but it doesn't go in a straight line from our unconscious to becoming conscious. It travels by way of an intermediary, a host. Our task then is to identify who these 'heroes' are in our lives, what they are embodying and carrying for us and then to bring our gold home.

If we first reject, then project, the withdrawing of projections, then, is a process of acceptance and integration.

We begin by identifying who the other is that is carrying around our untapped potential. To do this, think about the people you admire, the people you look up to or the people you envy. Choose one person from this list and then make a list of qualities or attributes that you admire or envy about them.

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In doing this exercise with a friend of mine, I was surprised to discover that she was a great admirer of Jungian analyst Clarissa Pinkola Estes. She explained that she was captivated when she read that Estes describes herself as a cantadora, a keeper of the old stories, stories that allow us to look into our deepest nature. She loved the idea of being a storyteller, playing with words, weaving them together, creating a magical atmosphere around an audience, transporting them to another world, into a space beyond time. For her, Estes embodies the magician archetype. The magician who is able to transform. For her, Estes is confident, gentle, has a deep inner knowing of what ought to be done to transform life, taking responsibility in an active yet gentle manner. Engaged in a community.

Once you have identified your 'hero' and made a list of the qualities or attributes that you admire or envy about him/her, then the next step would be to imagine what it would look like if you embodied that quality right now in your work, in relationships and emotional attitudes.

Returning to my friend, she imagined being able to engage in conversations in a gentle manner, moving away from her confrontational manner of communicating, saying "yes but" to a gentler style of communication, saying "yes and I wonder if it could also look like this?" She imagined being able to entertain people with stories. She imagined listening to other people's stories with curiosity. She imagined listening to herself in a less judgmental, less critical way. She imagined what a world would look like in which she was not seen as being difficult but seen as being gentle, engaging, interesting.

Could she then accept her gentle nature? Could she then find compassion for herself and others? Could she find a way to engage in this manner with the world?

Once she could accept that these qualities exist within her, the next step, then, would be to reintegrate these qualities into her life.

You can do this by brainstorming a list of things you can do each day to strengthen that dimension of yourself, as if you are strengthening a new muscle.

Finally, “act as if.” Act as if you already possess this quality, as if it’s already an integral part of you. As David Richo writes, “At first this means ‘acting as if’ but soon we act with ease and even more of our hidden powers become accessible to us.”

TURNING NOW TO THE VILLAINS

My head has been reeling since I came across this quote from Jung:

“But what if I should discover that the least amongst them all, the poorest of all beggars, the most impudent of all offenders, yeah, the very fiend himself, that these are within me, and that I myself stand in need of the alms of my own kindness, that I myself am the enemy who must be loved. What then?” [CW 11, par. 520]

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Here we see that the villain, the enemy and the beggar are figurative inner images that evoke and hold our projections. All of these qualities get packed away into what psychoanalysts call the shadow, or what poet Robert Bly called an invisible bag we drag behind us from childhood.

These villains carry the rejected parts of our shadow, making it much easier to fight the villain “out there”: and in this way delude ourselves that we can get rid of our own shadow, our own shortcomings, the unconscious, unacceptable parts of ourselves.

But here Jung cautions us:

“How can I be substantial if I fail to cast a Shadow? I must have a dark side if I am to be whole; and in as much as I become conscious of my Shadow, I also remember that I am a human being like any other.” [Modern Man in Search of a Soul, pg. 35]

Your shadow does not make you a bad person and it is nothing to feel shame about—we all have things within ourselves that we hide from others. Instead of avoiding those things, we can learn to accept them and love our whole self without judgment. Shadow integration brings you back to your innate wholeness, to seeing every part of yourself and accepting it for what it is. Shadow work is an act of radical self-acceptance and self-compassion—an act of forgiveness and self-love. It gives you freedom and liberation. Self-compassion then moves out into the

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world, and we find ourselves more compassionate, understanding and accepting of others. Or in the words of Jung:

“To confront a person with his shadow is to show him his own light. Once one has experienced a few times what it is like to stand judgmentally between the opposites, one begins to understand what is meant by the self. Anyone who perceives his shadow and his light simultaneously sees himself from two sides and thus gets in the middle.” [CW10, par 872]

Once again what has been rejected is projected and withdrawing our projections is about acceptance and re-integration.

Think for a moment about someone you dislike, someone who rubs you the wrong way, someone who irritates you? You might even think about the type of people who you really just can't stand. A word of caution is needed at this point.

Note here we are speaking about using the emotion of irritation, of dislike and we are not referring to people who have caused great harm to you or your family. We are not looking at traumatic events or people who have caused trauma to you.

Once you have identified these villains, list the traits or characteristics these people or group of people embody. Perhaps they are arrogant or rude or know-it-alls?

Perhaps you just can't stand lazy people? Or people who have to be the center of attention all the time?

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Once you have identified these traits or characteristics, some self-reflection is needed, since the reflection of this trait or characteristic is not necessarily a direct one. For example, you may have an interaction with a person who immediately resorts to anger, and you get triggered by their aggression. What is your shadow here? The answer to this question is not a one-size-fits-all. It is completely personal and individual. For example, you may resort to anger very quickly yourself, so you are observing an aspect you dislike about yourself in another person and seeing this triggers your lack of self-acceptance. Alternatively, it may be that you never resort to anger yourself, but you feel triggered by this situation because you do not know how to regulate your own emotions and express anger yourself, so it makes you uncomfortable to be around it.

It is also important when working with shadow traits and characteristics to realise that

these shadow aspects are bivalent in nature; that is, every trait or characteristic holds both constructive and destructive capacities, not one or the other. The very significant implication of this idea being that consciousness is best served by being aware of both the productive and destructive characteristics. Turning once again to the example of anger, let's take a look at its destructive characteristics.

Anger born from privilege and assumption aims to control and bully. It builds nothing but destruction. It is punitive, oppressive and strives to shame and diminish.

But anger can be constructive as well. It identifies where you need to build boundaries, what you are not willing to allow or do not deserve. It fuels your will power to resist behavior which you should not accept.

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In this example, you can see how a shadow quality contains both constructive and destructive qualities. Once you can identify the shadow quality and its bivalent expressions, it is then possible to play with a way to use it either constructively or contain it in an aspect of life or work where it can be used to help or assist you. Most shadow qualities can be contained this way. There are very few that need to be opposed. Even if you realize that you have a sadomasochistic shadow, it is worth containing it in the bedroom and removing it from your relationships at work and with family or friends.

Shadows may also show up in close relationships, as the people we love the most are often our biggest mirrors. As an example: Let's say you are currently seeking commitment from a romantic partner, but they show up completely emotionally unavailable and uncommitted. Rather than seeing yourself as the victim in this situation, ask yourself whether there is possibly an aspect of yourself that unconsciously is not willing to commit, that is emotionally unavailable, that maybe fears the love you deserve and desire.

Identifying, accepting and bringing home that which has been rejected and projected, requires shifting from Mars to Eros, or to love and relatedness. And if we are able to do that, then we become more compassionate to others, more able to accept weaknesses in the other person. In fact, the more we are in touch with our inner villains, the more we will be able to respect the other, seeing them more as a person, and less as a label. This compassion frees us from our prejudices and biases, forming a bridge to a more authentic connection and relatedness.

APPLICATIONS:

The applications will run for two weeks. We have two applications we would love for you to share on the Facebook Forum.

Week 1: Seeking the hero

Step 1: Think of someone you admire or envy. Make a list of qualities or attributes you admire or envy about them. Choose one to work on first.

Step 2: Envision what it would look like if you embodied that quality right now in your work, relationships, and emotional attitudes.

Step 3: Describe in your personal journal how embodying this quality can change your life. If, for example, you're working with the quality of persistence that you admire in someone, write down how your life will transform when you reclaim this power.

Step 4: Brainstorm a list of things you can do each day to strengthen that dimension of yourself as if you are strengthening a new muscle.

Step 5: Finally, "act as if." Act as if you already possess this quality, as if it's already an integral part of you.

Week 2: Recognizing the villain within

Step 1: Think of someone you dislike, someone who rubs you the wrong way, someone who irritates you. Here it is important that you don't choose someone who has caused you trauma or real harm in your life. Make a list of qualities or attributes you dislike about them or that irritates you about them. Choose one to work on first.

Step 2: Describe in your personal journal how this quality lives within you.

Step 3: Identify the constructive and destructive characteristics of this quality.

Step 4: Brainstorm a list of ways in which this trait or characteristic might live constructively in your life or if it can't, find a constructive use, how it might be contained.

CONCLUSION

Congratulations, you have completed the third week of Maya's Labyrinth. The next module will focus on Sensing Symbols: the language of the soul.