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## Chapter I

# **The Couple Archetype**

Sometimes when I am sitting with a couple in a therapy session, a story, a myth or a legend comes to mind. And then we are no longer only the three of us. The archetypal characters are in our midst. The couple's story suddenly assumes new dimensions. It invokes a story as old as the human race's existence on this earth and at the same time, is completely new.

The myth is alive and active in our lives, not only as individuals, but also as partners in the couple. This book is about couples in myth and in therapy. All the people and couples appearing in the book have agreed to have their story told without disclosing their identities. I thank them for their openness and courage.

There is no greater mystery than the moment of beginning – that point in time and space where once there was "nothing," and now there is "being." In the timeless obscurity of the past, somewhere there is a nucleus, which contains everything still to be developed, the entire future still to be revealed. Out of chaos, a world is born.

By our very nature, we humans seek the order of things and their evolution. For the sake of this order, we set a starting point, the moment of genesis from which mortals then began

to exist in a world of ordered processes. The first parents gave birth to children who, in turn, give birth to others and on until the actual link in the chain – us, is reached.

The fact of our existence here and now embodies all the previous stages: a birth from the mother's womb, a life that began to develop when an ovule was fertilized by a father's sperm. The father and mother were born from the wombs of other mothers whose ovules were fertilized by the sperm of other fathers and so on right back to the first parents. Even if the genealogy across the generations is unknown to us, the very idea of its existence provides a sense of continuity and security in a world in which the unexpected is frequent and the predictable rare.

The power of the couple archetype expresses itself in longing and yearning and subsequently, in the actual union of a real couple, with its own unique characteristics. Wrapped in the mystery of attraction and attachment, it promises wholeness, security and stability and at the same time, is a source of pain and crisis. The roots of the deep need for uniting with another human being and creating a couple are buried in the depths of the collective psyche. The legacy of our ancestors, our personal trials and experiences, our fantasies and wishes, influence us on both the conscious and unconscious levels. The archetypal image of the mother and that of the father, as well as our childish imaginings of our parents as a couple, are etched in the psyche of each one of us. They leave imprints that exercise a profound influence on shaping the couple image that we carry within us.

Without realizing it, throughout our lives, each one of us

experiences myths and legends. Our lives may seem dull and gloomy and yet, they contain endless possibilities even when we do not introduce any radical changes. When our "inner eye" opens, that same eye that can see into our psyche and thus, our own myths are revealed. And when the private myth is integrated with the rich human heritage of archetypes and symbols, we can discover, here and now, endless treasures within our life cycle.

Myths are "archetypal stories" common to all mankind, telling us about life and death. The original meaning of the word "myth" is a thing, a word, a fact, a story. Its significance, however, has no bearing on mundane words, but to meaningful words that not only indicate things in general, but are the thing itself; words that are living images. The myth is an everlasting story since it delves into the depths of human experience. It represents a complex image, evoking powerful emotions, such as pity, revulsion, terror and distress. Its effect on the soul is similar to that of catharsis. It does not offer solutions to our existential problems, nor does it offer guidance in any particular direction.

As with dreams, myths are not intended to be interpreted literally for the purpose of enabling us to draw immediate and practical conclusions. Given that it is a symbolic story, a myth lends itself to many different interpretations. Receptivity to the myth's complex meaning and a readiness to absorb its diversified symbolism enable us to be aware about the opposites within ourselves. The Greeks were well aware of this. Aristotle called the emotional process that the spectator undergoes when watching a tragedy "catharsis." It

is a process of empathy and identification that gives rise to powerful emotions of compassion and awe and brings about a kind of purgation.

The healing power of the catharsis is determined by the spectator's capacity to identify with the hero, even if the spectator were not personally exposed to the same trials. This kind of empathy and identification is possible because every mythical hero is a part of our psyche. The myth mostly expresses what we identify deep within ourselves as the basic human experience. It is as if a play were moved from one place to another, each time the actors dressing up in local costumes as they repeat and revert to the same pattern of the original play.

Creating a myth is a psychological process that is elementary and necessary to the human psyche, whether of primitive or modern people. The mythical motifs are structural elements of the collective unconscious, which is why they appear in legends and traditional tales as collective creations. To an individual, on the other hand, they appear in dreams and visions. The myth, according to the researcher of mythology, Joseph Campbell, is a public dream, while the dream is the private myth of each one of us.

Both myth and dream represent humanity's central dilemmas. The mythological event, unlike the historical one, is part of the present and the past at one and the same time. The effect it has on our lives is not only through a chain of historical events, but it is instantaneous and direct. In its concentrated, pointed way, the myth relates the most essential truths of man's soul and his life. Desires, wishes and fantasies

are portrayed with a bold and sure stroke, unhesitatingly, transparently and with no affectation. The unfolding of events in the hero's life, the way the hero is constantly at the mercy of fate's relentless machinations, which last until the inevitable end is reached – all these are cut straight out of human reality.

Connecting to a myth can make us realize that a transcendental dimension, beyond the personal, exists in our psyche as well; that my circumscribed life circle connects with lives that have existed from time immemorial. Such a connection enables us, even if very briefly, to cast a deeper and more extensive gaze into our inner being and even into parts and layers that are unknown to the everyday consciousness of our self-knowledge.

### *The Feminine and Masculine Archetypes: "Anima" and "Animus"*

A man and a woman meet. Apparently it is an encounter between a man and a woman who are more or less identified with the gender identity that matches their self-definition. On the unconscious level, however, the inner image that each of them carries is projected on the actual woman or man. It is a complex image, rousing passions, hopes, expectations and disappointments.

What takes place, then, is an encounter between opposite poles, a kind of encounter in reverse: the anima, the feminine principle present in man, encounters the animus, the masculine principle present in woman. Powerful archetypes

are at work, which influence both partners and guide them unconsciously.

Jung called the feminine archetype that exists in the unconscious of the man "anima," and the masculine archetype that exists in the unconscious of the woman "animus."<sup>1</sup> The word "anima" means soul. That is to say, the anima is the man's soul, which connects him to his inner psychic world. The word "animus" means Logos, which signifies thinking and spirit.

It is appropriate here to point out that when the terms "anima" and "animus" are mentioned, they do not imply a narrow, stereotyped definition of femininity and masculinity. The "masculine" and the "feminine" represent a wealth of profound ideas, images, emotions and concepts. The animus as Logos represents the word as the power of creating and doing in the world; it represents differentiation, thinking and analysis. The anima as Eros represents love, the drive and ability to joining and relating.

Anima and animus are opposites – but they are also supplementary and complementary. We are developing toward wholeness when we are able to accept all aspects of both as parts of our personality, without condemning some of them as negative, forbidden, irrelevant or unsuitable – when we do not search for them outside but in ourselves; when they are not despised or angrily rejected or attacked for being what they are.

Anima and animus are archetypal figures, which have roots in the feminine or masculine archetypes on the one hand and in the individual consciousness on the other, thus connecting

between them. Both are complex psychic systems, consisting of the opposite gender's elements, the encounter and experiences of the opposite gender personal parent and the collective image of the opposite gender.

Thus, the man's anima is determined by the archetypal feminine elements in his collective unconscious layer, his encounter with his mother and other women who played a significant part in his life, as well as the cultural-collective image of the woman in general. The woman's animus is determined by the archetypal masculine elements, her experience with her personal father and other significant men in her life and the cultural image of the man.

Although anima and animus are parts of the whole psyche, they remain unconscious. Consciously, we identify with the persona, which matches our gender. "Persona" is what Jung calls the gender identity that one acquires as a result of one's milieu's influences and pressures and of imitating role models that cross one's path in the process of development. The persona is the mask that each one of us wears and frequently it seems to us that this mask – our persona – is the only one that reflects ourselves. But it does not only face outward. The persona also influences us inwardly. The more the conscious ego identifies with the persona of the masculine man and the feminine woman – the more repressed will be the counter gender, exerting its unconscious influence on the choice of a partner and on the couple relationship.

For the young boy, the feminine is all-encompassed in his mother. Gradually, over the course of his development, the image of the anima as different from mother is awakened in

the boy's imagination. This differentiation of the feminine is expressed in the boy's fantasies and in his new love objects, which are younger than his mother: younger women relatives, women teachers and as he grows up – girls he meets outside his family circle. The image of the anima, the internal image of the woman the man carries within him, acts both on the choice of a partner and on the nature of the relationship that is formed with her.

The projection of the anima remains unconscious as long as the man is unaware of his internal feminine archetype and colors his relationship with his partner, for better or for worse.

The animus, the archetypal masculine figure, is not the exact opposite of the anima. It is multifaceted and its influences are more connected to cultural and sociological variables than are those of the anima.

Because in our patriarchal society, masculine-Logos qualities are more valued than those of the feminine-Eros, women may strive to acquire them or to connect to a man that represents them. Animus is experienced as a stranger, frequently as threatening and violent or critical and dominant. It can also be experienced as an ideal hero to admire or a young lover. Animus can be the Great Father, a god image, a guru.

In the process of individuation, the animus of a woman goes through various transformations and is projected on the men she meets. Along with her growing awareness and connectedness to her own femininity – the animus of a woman can transform from the self-critical inner voice to the Logos as empowering her to doing in the world and later

on to the spiritual dimension in her life. As with the man, the internal image of the animus is projected on an actual man with whom the woman falls in love and on the role she expects him to play in her and in the couple's life.

The dynamics of the couple's relationship and the way the couple evolves during their lifetime are influenced by the driving force of anima and animus toward change and development: Move away from the starting point of a strong identification with the persona that matches our gender and open out toward conscious containment and integration of the anima and animus.

It may seem easier, on the face of it, to live our lives with the parts that we find hard to contain projected onto the other, the partner. But this state of unconsciousness and endless projections is one-sided and destructive. Its inevitable outcome is blindness and distortion in our interpersonal relationships, leading ultimately to a destruction of our ties with those around us. Containing all our opposite parts demands a more complex confrontation with us, which can be quite challenging and difficult. However, the more we strive to accept our anima and animus and to integrate the "I" with the "not-I," the less we will project them onto our partner.

Jung called the internal unity of the anima and animus "Conjunctio."<sup>2</sup> The Conjunctio – conjunction, is the joining of opposites, which is symbolized as the "internal marriage." This union is expressed symbolically in mystical and religious ideas, the essence of which is a symbolic marriage of masculinity and femininity: "yin" and "yang," "Yahwe" and "Shekinah," "Shiva" and "Shakti." The unity in the

human psyche is the essential tie that enables the human being to connect with the inner world and the outer reality.

### *The Life Cycle of the Couple*

The life cycle of a couple, just like that of an individual, is the path they take as they develop during their lifetime. This cycle has its own laws, rules and dynamics. It can be said that the couple is traveling by train, with its own tracks, stations and travel codes.

In the course of their development as a couple within their life span, it is possible to trace the changing influences of the initial archetypal encounter. The subsequent developmental stages of the couple's life cycle can therefore be known in advance as transformation of the self and of the anima and animus. But, at the end of the day, the survival of the relationship lies in the readiness of each partner to be open and to acknowledge their opposite internal aspects, to give up the fantasies associated with the archetypes, to stop projecting onto the partner and ultimately, reach unity.

Let us trace the life cycle of the couple, starting with falling in love and making a choice, by way of blind love and symbiosis, through disillusionment and coming to terms with reality, to mature intimacy in dialogue. Each of these phases appears in myths and legends of various cultures and ages. The myth tells the stories of a universal and timeless human experience – the encounter of the anima and animus and that of the couple. Connecting with it enables us to break out of the confines of our personal story and relate to a much

broader narrative. As in a dream, so it is when it comes to myth – a message is addressed to us and as such, it embodies an instructive and healing power.

### *Falling in Love and Making a Choice*

Stories about love at first sight are a key theme in myths and legends of all nations and cultures. The enchantment that these stories cast upon us is the archetypal power preserved throughout the ages.

The biblical love story of Jacob and Rachel tells about their fateful first encounter. The moment Jacob sets his eyes upon Rachel, he falls in love with her. This love for the anima figure transforms him and is the driving force behind every move he makes from that moment onward.

In the Greco-Roman love story of Cupid and Psyche, Cupid falls in love with Psyche, his anima, who liberates him from his symbiosis with his mother, Venus. For her part, Psyche falls in love with Cupid and is ready to sacrifice all for his sake and confront every test demanded of her. This readiness leads to her developing into a mature woman.

In the great medieval romance, Tristan's falling in love with Iseult is fatal, since, from that point on, it determines the chain of events until the lover's death. Similarly, the star-crossed lovers Romeo and Juliet persevere in their love for each other despite all the opposition arrayed against them. Their love leads to their death; at the same time, however, it liberates their families from the unremitting enmity between them.