

A biography of carl jung



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Carl Jung: A biography

“ We live in an age that is trying to find its soul.”

Golden words by the man who lived exactly to do that – Finding The Soul. He lived to find the soul of the individual, to find the collective soul of the community and to spread his knowledge of the same through younger generations.

He had arrived on-the-bloc when understanding the mind was a scientific Everest that every known and unknown psychoanalyst was trying to conquer, and brought along some theories that revolutionized the way things were perceived.

So much so that the reigning king of psychiatry, Sigmund Freud called him his successor!

This is a brief history of the life and times of the revered psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung, his bittersweet relationship with his mentor, his torrid extra-marital affairs and his humble, yet disturbed beginnings. It is a story of how his theories transformed the field of psychotherapy and gave us concepts that are applicable and functional even in today's modern world of psychoanalysis...

Of ' Unstable' Beginnings...

Paul Achilles Jung, a poor pastor from Thurgau, Switzerland, was married to the daughter of his rich Hebrew professor, Emilie Preiswerk. Paul and his wife Emilie had a total of four children, but the first three did not survive. The

fourth child, however, was born healthy and passed the test of time and survival. This young boy, born on the 26th of July 1875, was Carl Gustav Jung.

Soon after his birth, his father was shifted to a rather plush parish in the area of Laufen, Switzerland where Carl would come to spend most of his early childhood.

His father was a rather towering influence on young Carl's psyche. As his mother was considered to be a highly eccentric woman who remained confined to her bedroom most of the times and claimed to have spiritual presence around her, he ended up spending most of the time in the protective eyes and supervision of his father. His mother would be depressed and under self-imposed lock-up and would talk to these so-called 'spirits' during the nights.

As a result of her eccentricities, Carl's parents always had a strenuous and dysfunctional relationship. While his mother was mostly under self-imposed confinement and sometimes at medical facilities for various unknown physical ailments, his father sometimes tried to move to stay closer to her and sometimes gave up on her altogether.

One of the earliest memories of himself that he could remember was seeing a luminous figure with a detached head emerging from his mother's bedroom at night.

For a boy of his age, Carl was always very peculiar, in his mannerism and conduct. Even in school, he had developed two distinct personalities within

his head. He termed them 'Personality 1' – the normal school-going boy who lived in the same era, and 'Personality 2' – a menacing dictator belonging to the past.

He believed his mother, just like himself, also dealt with multiple personalities in her head, and thus spoke of these spirits that visited her.

Another peculiar incident from his childhood was the fact that he carved a mannequin in his wooden measure-scale and used to take secret messages to it, in a language that he had created himself (almost like a form of voodoo/idol worship).

An interesting anecdote from his childhood gives us a peek into his analytical and psychological side. In 1887, at the age of 12, Carl got into a school fight, and in doing so, got pushed to the ground with such a force that he fainted on the spot. This incident had a distinct psychological imprint on his mind and he assumed that he would never have to go to school thenceforth, or he would faint. He remained home for the next 6 months under this assumption. But when he was made to go back to school for academic purposes, he started fainting every time he walked onto the campus!

Carl Jung showed a psychoanalytical inclination since a very early stage. Coupled with his mother's personality and his father's overbearing influence, he got enough to latch on to in his childhood, for him to take it up as a profession as an adult.

Too 'Jung' For Psychology...?

After finishing school, Carl was in somewhat of a dilemma as to what to pursue in college. He had a strong spiritual upbringing on account of his pastor father, and he was also equally interested in biology.

He went to the University of Basel in 1895 (age 20), and wasn't so keen on pursuing Psychology or Psychiatry, as they were considered to be very prestigious subjects at the time, that not a lot of students considered.

Slowly, with passing time, he came to realize that concepts of the psychoanalytical syllabus beautifully combined the regimes and teachings of biology of the human body with spirituality (inner processes) of the human mind. This interested him no end and proved to be just the answer to his dilemma. He was studying medicine at the university around this time.

At the young age of 25 in the year 1900, Jung had successfully graduated from the university and acquired a prestigious job at the psychiatric hospital of Burgholzli in Zurich. It was during this time, when he was working with another remarkable psychiatrist, Eugen Bleuler (who coined terms like 'Schizophrenia' and 'Autism'), that Jung became familiar with the widely revered Sigmund Freud and his work on the 'Unconscious' mind through his book, 'The Interpretation Of Dreams'.

While working at the hospital, Jung published his own doctoral dissertation paper, titled 'On The Psychology & Pathology Of The So-Called Occult Phenomenon' in the year 1903 (Age 28).

He also married Emma Rauschenbach in the same year (1903), and went on to have five children with her – Agatha, Gret, Franz, Marianne and Helene.

The marriage lasted until Emma's death in the year 1955; but throughout the marriage, Carl is believed to have engaged in several extra-marital affairs.

In the year 1906 (age 31), Carl published the book called 'Studies in Word Association', a copy of which, was sent by him to Sigmund Freud.

Freud and Jung: Friendship and Friction

By 1906, Freud was stepping down from his Psychoanalytical throne, and was so taken by the concepts introduced by Jung in his book, that he referred to him as his 'eldest son, successor and crown prince'.

After reading Jung's 'Studies In Word Association', Freud arranged for a meeting with him. It was a discussion that would lay the founding stones for a long-lasting friendship. It is believed that Jung and Freud sat together for nearly 13 hours and discussed the concepts of new-age psychology at-length.

There was merely any contact between the two of them for the next six months. Freud's theory of the 'Unconscious mind' had been subjected to commendation and condemnation at the same time, and he needed a young and emerging psychoanalyst to back him up. This is when he sent a bunch of his published papers and essays to Carl Jung, who was only too eager to lap it up and support it.

His association with Sigmund Freud helped Jung's career as a psychologist a great deal! By 1908 (age 33) he became the Editor of the newly founded yearbook for psychoanalytical and psychopathological research.

Two years later, in 1910 (age 35), he was bestowed with the prestigious Chairmanship of the International Psychoanalytical Association, all in lieu of Freud's recommendation.

After a great friendship of 5-6 years, tensions started brewing between the two, mainly over the concept of 'unconscious' and its contribution to a person's 'Personality'. While Freud credited the unconscious with the complete responsibility of forming one's personality, Jung wanted to believe that it is indeed vastly responsible but cannot be solely credited.

Around the same time, 1911-1912, when Jung was working on his book, 'Psychology of the Unconscious', Freud visited his friend and colleague, Ludwig Binswanger in Kreuzlingen (Switzerland), but completely avoided meeting him in the nearby Zurich. He called this incident the 'Kreuzlingen Gesture'.

The equation kept souring over the period of time and the friendship had reached its inevitable end. Jung and Freud met for the last time in September 1913 (age 38), at the International Psychoanalytical Congress, where his lecture about the concepts of distinct personality types – 'Introverts' and 'Extroverts', would set him apart from Freud's works for the better part of the next century.

The split from Freud left a metaphoric scar on Jung. He was traumatized at having lost a near and dear friend and supporter. He started experiencing a "horrible confrontation with the unconscious". He started seeing things and hearing voices, and became so frantic with these new phenomena, that he started recording his hallucinations in a leather-bound red book.

Jung was to become a public figure right at the onset of the First World War. Even though he was suffering a great deal after his split from Freud, his contributions to psychoanalysis were to take the world by storm...

Jung: Works, Views and Wisdom...

Like all masterminds and visionaries of the early 20th century, Carl Jung also faced the World Wars and had his share of battleground experience. Right after his split from Freud, at a mentally vulnerable stage, he joined the Swiss Army in the capacity of a doctor and served in World War I.

His differences with the great Sigmund Freud had, in a way, forced him into a shell, and he started keeping a low profile throughout the 1920s (in his 40s), and only made public appearances for one-off lectures in foreign lands. His works were made famous outside of Switzerland through colleague and translator Constance Long, who also motivated him to give lectures in USA, England and other foreign locales.

Contrary to his personal life, Jung's works were keeping anything but a 'low profile'. They had caused a revolution-of-sorts and proved to be an equal and opposite theory for Freud's archaic methods of psychoanalysis and psychiatry...

His concepts of 'Introversion' and 'Extroversion' spread like wildfire and gained popularity. These concepts are followed by psychoanalysts till date.

The main reason for the differences in opinion between him and Freud was the fact that he believed Freud's definition of 'Unconscious' was inadequate and unnecessarily negative. While Freud believed that the unconscious is

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only a repository of suppressed memories and wants and needs, Jung argued that unconscious was actually divided in 2 parts – ‘ Personal Unconscious’ and ‘ Collective Unconscious’. The personal unconscious was responsible for suppressed desires of the individual, whereas the collective unconscious was a far deeper repository dealing with the suppressed emotions of a community. He tried to explain that people, as a group, share a form of unconscious mind, and that it was the explanation for phenomena like Telepathy.

He also introduced the concept of ‘ Individuation’ in which, personal and collective unconscious were brought into existence through dreams, active imaginations or free associations. He believed that a person who has advanced towards the ‘ Individuation’ process is more mature, harmonious and responsible.

Jung’s concept of ‘ Persona’ was also popular amongst the psychoanalysts of the time. He defined ‘ Persona’ to be a mask of sorts; a consciously put-on personality, created out of the collective psyche through socialization, cultural influences and experience. He believed that a psychoanalyst should try to initiate the ‘ Individuation’ process by liberating the patient from the deceptive cover of this ‘ Persona’.

Carl Jung’s political views were caught in crossfire more than once.

Throughout the 1930s (when he was in his 50s), and specifically during the second World War, he had famously maintained contact with some of his Jewish colleagues, and, at the same time voiced his sympathies for some German psychoanalyst who were Nazi-supporters.

Jung was sorely disappointed when, *Zentralblatt Für Psychotherapie*, under his editorship, published some pro-Nazi statements, and he was held personally liable and responsible for these sentiments. He made various attempts to clear his stand on the Anti-Semitism movement, but his teachings and writing were increasingly misconstrued to be pro-Nazi. Finally, to battle these allegations, he issued a statement against Hitler, stating: “Germany is infested by one man who is obviously possessed.”

Carl Jung was of an extremely individualistic opinion when it came to politics. He believed that an individual should be allowed to make his own choices, and that a ‘State’ had taken the place of God, and was suitably run only by the people who knew how to manipulate it.

Towards the end of his life, Jung had become an extremely spiritual man, and his beliefs and theories had also begun to be cast in a spiritual mould. He travelled to Kenya to discover the ‘primitive psychology’ of tribes that had been culturally isolated.

Later, in the year 1937 (age 62), he delivered the famous Terry lectures in USA and England on the topic, ‘Psychology and Religion’. In the same year, he travelled to India to understand the concepts of religion and spirituality as they were seen in these parts. He admitted that his Indian expedition was far more successful than his tribal trips to Kenya, as language barrier wasn’t a difficulty in India. Although, he admitted that the concepts of ‘Atmaa’ or ‘Self’ and inner insights into these were lost on him.

It was during this spiritual phase, that Jung contributed to the formation of the ‘Alcoholics Anonymous’. Even though the contribution wasn’t direct, he

is credited with some acclaim to have set the ball rolling. He had once advised one of his American patients who was suffering from incurable alcoholism, to seek a spiritual experience to get rid of his problem. The solution worked and the American came back home and told about this to his fellow alcoholics. Word spread and Bill Wilson, the founder of 'AA' adopted this theory for his 12-step program...

Jung: The Man, The Mind and The Mystery...

As he grew into the revered psychoanalyst and psychiatrist that we know of today, Jung started looking back and self-assessing his life and came up with some remarkable explanations for the relationships he had had.

He explained that his parents' relationship had a great effect on his mind, and it was during this time, that he began to see women as 'unreliable' and 'unstable', given his mother's condition. He admitted that it was probably around this time in his life that he became a patriarch and that it was the 'handicap he started out with'...

It was probably because of this 'handicap' that he never had a smooth relationship with his wife. He was famously involved with Sabina Spielrein and Toni Wolff, two of the earliest female psychoanalysts. He, however, never sought a divorce and saw his marriage through, until his wife expired in 1955 when he was 80. Not much is known about his 5 children either.

His wife, his affairs, his children and Sigmund Freud were inseparable parts of his existence, and mostly contributed to the overall shaping of his personality. The leather-bound red book that he recorded his post-Freud

hallucinations in was recently published for public consumption. Another source for understanding his relationship with Freud is the critically acclaimed 2011 Hollywood film ' A Dangerous Method', which is primarily based on Freud, Jung and Sabina Spielrein.

It is believed that towards the end of his life, Jung had a series of visions, or dreams so-to-say, where he envisioned himself advancing towards a tower of light at the end of a lake! Surprisingly, soon after these mysterious premonitions, he suffered a short illness and passed away on Jun 6, 1961, at the age of 86.

Jung was a man of science and spirituality, and in his doings throughout his life, he tried to put together an explanation for the true meaning of life.

Much to his success and the passing down of his concepts, we now follow a large portion of his teachings, theories and discoveries and he is still revered as the master of modern psychology over Freud...