

Jung and Buddhism: Archetypal Images in Ordinary Life.

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C. G. Jung writes that “ever since the *Bardo Thödol* [*The Tibetan Book of the Dead*], was first published it has been my constant companion, and to it I owe not only many stimulating ideas and discoveries, but also many fundamental insights.”¹ Jung’s lifelong study of eastern wisdom and its practical teachings for western psychology is well known. Close friends reported that Jung was reading Buddhist texts even while on his deathbed.

The impact of these insights and discoveries from eastern thought on modern psychotherapy and analysis, and most importantly how they affect us in daily life, especially as clinicians will be the topic of this workshop. We’ll explore a few of Jung’s most basic ideas on the subject of Individuation as a “western yoga”, and the experience of the archetypal realm as a transitional space on the way to a fuller experience of what it means to be human.

Jung understood, for example, the *Bardo Thödol* [*The Tibetan Book of the Dead*] as a dialogue. It is a communication between the living (a conscious being), and the dead (the one who is in an unconscious space); yet they are both in life. They are communicating through the *Bardo*, or “in-between” or transitional space in life (not unlike the transference in psychotherapy). Mystical wisdom and practical advice are revealed through this encounter reminiscent of the dialogue in psychotherapy that we are all so familiar with. Emotion, affect, and the intensity of the expression become carriers of meaning akin to the images depicted in Buddhist art and iconography. Psychological processes ensue that are much like talking to a figure in a dream, or engaging in a conversation with a part of oneself heretofore unknown. Life unfolds. We’ll look at some examples from daily life and ancient art to see if we can experience this idea.

A deep engagement with an analysis of the unconscious, Jung argues, corresponds to the initiation (and goal) described in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* [*Bardo Thödol*]. Psychotherapy is a self-birthing that can be seen in universal images and that leads to its own ending (as do studies of the self). How we get in trouble in this process and how we find ourselves in it develops into the archetypal experience of individuation. Our experience of these archetypal images reveals the emotional ground that gives birth to both our freedom and our relationship to the world.

“What the dead man has to recognize... [is] that his own psychic self and the giver of all data are one and the same.”² The important question then becomes whether we are alive or dead, and what if anything we can do about this. This path is a “western yoga” that Jung called ‘Individuation.’ It will be explored in this workshop through discussion, reflection and sharing.

¹(C.G. Jung, *Collected Works*, Vol. 11, Par. 833)

²Ibid, Par. 857

Bio: J. Gordon Nelson, Ph.D. is a certified Jungian Analyst, practicing in Santa Monica, California. He is past president of the C. G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles. He teaches candidates in analytical training, lectures and is a member of the teaching faculty of the Southern California Society of Jungian Analysts. He has a particular interest in teaching courses based on the *Collected Works* of C. G. Jung, especially *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, and in various meditation practices.