

Zen Koans as Myths Reflecting Individuation

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There is a destination, a possible goal, beyond the . . . [alienations of self]. That is the way of individuation. Individuation means becoming a single, homogeneous being, and, in so far as “individuality” embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one’s own self. We could therefore translate individuation as “coming to selfhood” or “self-realization.” (Jung 1928/1969, CW 7, ¶266)

Individuation, the process of human development, was frequently cited by Jung and was of obvious importance in his conception of analytic work. Individuation has also been frequently cited in works comparing and contrasting Jungian psychology and Buddhism (Jones, 1979; Kawai, 1992; Meckel and Moore 1992; Payne and Petropoulos 2002). Rather than comparing or contrasting the two, in this article, Jung’s methods of seeking wisdom in myth are applied to Zen koans to explore the process of individuation.

Jung defined a myth as “. . . essentially a product of the unconscious archetype and . . . therefore a symbol which requires psychological interpretation” (1957/1964, CW 10, ¶625). More directly addressing the centrality of myth and religion, he said, “. . . it is only too obvious that myth is an integral component of all religions” (¶551). In other writings, he referenced myths for the insights they offer with respect to various theories and perspectives (1943/1969, CW 7, ¶160; 1954, CW 16, ¶96; 1934/1954, CW 17, ¶318). Therefore, referencing myth for information about the process of individuation is well within the context of Jung’s own work. Marie-Louise von Franz continued in this tradition in such books as *The Feminine in Fairy Tales* (1993). In this work, von Franz cites examples of familiar fairy tales with variants that use the names of Gods and Goddesses as protagonists rather than the ordinary people in more common versions, concluding that “there is no difference between fairy tales and myth, but rather both deal with archetypal figures” (5). In examining Sleeping Beauty

(also called Briar Rose), von Franz proceeds through the events of the story, gleaning the symbolic significance of each step. The story begins with the king and queen who have been previously unable to have a child; here, von Franz notes that we all have periodic times of passivity prior to reengaging creativity (26). When they are finally able to have a child, the king and queen welcome her with a celebration but omit inviting one wise woman. This, von Franz tells us, metaphorically represents the manner in which we omit natural (and perhaps needed) ways of behaving from our repertoire (29). It is this step-wise approach to seeking wisdom from the process of the story that will be applied to koans herein.

In his introduction to *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell says, "It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols to carry the human spirit forward . . ." (1949, 11). Jean Shinoda Bolen also writes in *The Goddesses in Every Woman*, "The Greek myths—and all other myths and fairy tales—remain current and personally relevant because there is a ring of truth in them about shared human experience" (1984, 6). In this article, the stories of Zen koans will be examined for the current and relevant aspects of human experience they reveal in each step of their narrative. However, before referencing them as myth, it may be beneficial to provide a brief history of koans.

When Buddhism was established in China in the middle of the first millennium of the Common Era, informal encounters between students and teachers were used to help both enhance their understanding. Stories of these encounters were repeated, refined, and built upon for centuries before being codified and published toward the end of the first millennium and the beginning of the next. Although specific books of koans were passed from China to other Asian countries and have been translated into English, there is no one set or system of koans that is universally used. Different schools, traditions, and teachers use different koans, with some still being created or adapted for specific circumstances. Commentary about the koans have developed and followed them as well, with contributions currently available from Chinese-Buddhist teachers from the end of the first millennium, teachers from other Asian countries, and modern Western teachers. Like myths and folktales of other traditions, koans were first transmitted orally and only later published.

The dictionary definition of myth is "a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon."¹ Other definitions also specify that myths relate to religious beliefs.² While koans clearly fit the criteria of these definitions, perhaps more germane to this discussion is the presence of archetypal material within the stories. The very persistence of koans over centuries and across cultures and eras demonstrates a resonance within the human psyche that affirms their archetypal nature, qualifies them to be considered as myths, and affirms they are worthy of being mined for their symbolic

messages. If not for their archetypal quality and their ring of truth in the human experience, they would not have been carried through the centuries and across continents to be studied in the West today. As asserted by von Franz, no attempt will be made to distinguish myths from folktales, fairy tales, or other traditional story forms.

As used today in the West, one of these (ancient or new) stories is given to a student by his or her teacher; the student then responds with an appropriate presentation (an active expression) rather than an intellectual explanation, bringing life to the story here and now. Discovering and distilling the spontaneous presentation may take concerted effort over time on the student's part. According to Robert Aitken, a recently deceased teacher in the Diamond Sangha Zen tradition based in Honolulu, Hawai'i, "Through this process, we discover that life and death are the same as no-life and no-death; the other is no other than myself; each being is infinitely precious as a unique expression of the nature which is essential to us all" (1990, xiv).

What are the symbolic meanings of koans? Without a doubt, some of the associations derived from the symbolism of koans were culturally influenced; the interactions in the stories were set within the social norms of ancient China. Nevertheless, there are aspects of the mythic exploration of koans that both touch on the collective experiences of individuation and are relevant more specifically to modern Westerners. Koans that address Jung's process of individuation, including the realization and expression of one's individuality, demonstrate how Zen emphasizes an avoidance of concepts and instead favors direct experience in the process of self realization. Koan myths rarely address relational questions explicitly, however; although this may be an important limitation to their use in psychotherapeutic settings, it is not necessarily a limitation for their intended function in Zen practice nor in their benefit as background for the therapist.

Individuation, Expression of Essential Nature, and Koans: The Story of Mu Chou and Yun Men

Mu Chou was a hermit who lived along one of the paths monks frequently walked while on pilgrimage across ancient China. Some stories describe his kindness; he surreptitiously made sandals and left them for the pilgrims to find by the road. He was also known for his brusque teaching manner. In one story, Yun Men stopped and knocked on Mu Chou's door. On two occasions Mu Chou answered, immediately demanding, "Speak! Speak!" Two times Yun Men's answer was not adequate to prevent Mu Chou from quickly slamming the door. Upon a third try and a demand by Mu Chou to speak, Yun Men stuck out his leg to prevent Mu Chou from closing the door. Whether or not Mu Chou noticed the leg, he again slammed the door. Yun Men's leg was broken, and he cried out in pain. At this, Yun Men was enlightened, and in some versions, Mu Chou opened the door to welcome him in (Cleary 1992, 37–38; Ferguson 2000, 259).

This myth represents the challenges we encounter throughout each day to find our own response within and to the circumstances offered us. The concise koan form emphasizes timeless experience, minimizing words, analysis, and intellectual understanding. In the story, Mu Chou was not satisfied with just any response but welcomed only the deeply genuine and immediate. Here is a microcosm of koan training: The teacher calls for a response; the student at first hesitates, unable to respond spontaneously from his or her essential nature; the teacher communicates to the student that her or his response is not what is being sought; the student engages with the challenge and focuses attention, continuing to try until discovering and expressing her or his response. This can also be seen as an archetypal process of individuation. Yun Men was challenged to find his own voice in the face of the difficult Mu Chou. Mu Chou was not interested in social etiquette; he demanded that Yun Men get right to the heart of the matter—or leave.

In the face of a demand for speech such as Mu Chou's, it is easy to imagine anyone hesitating to first consider how to manage her or his persona. However, Mu Chou was too quick for that; he slammed the door before a safe response could be uttered. Even forewarned on the second and third visits, Yun Men still could not avoid attending to self protection first, self expression second. The process of individuation shown in the story unfolds in several steps:

1. Someone or some circumstance calls for our genuine response: In the story, Mu Chou demanded that Yun Men speak. In the myth as a metaphor for our archetypal response, our first effort is to protect our story of ourselves—we hesitate. We are unable to access an expression of our essential self. While this sounds grand, in our lives it can be as trivial as demurring from a compliment if we are hesitant to draw attention to ourselves or avoiding a topic when we've forgotten something about it we feel we should have remembered. In the therapy office, simply asking a new patient what brings him or her in can be the first call for a response. For the therapist, a new patient asking how he or she works can be a call for the therapist's genuine response.
2. We recognize the importance of the call: In the story, Yun Men could have continued his journey and left Mu Chou behind. Instead, he recognized that there was something in Mu Chou's demand that was of value to Yun Men. As a metaphor for our individuation process, we recognize an opportunity to express something deeper. Rather than continuing our lives without changing and without opening to ourselves, we instead choose to focus our intention and find our personal response. For a patient in therapy, this recognition may be demonstrated by returning to an appointment with an appropriate therapist after being frightened, disturbed, or offended by the material that arose

previously. As an example for the therapist, this call may be found after reflection upon an inadequate response given to a patient and the recognition of the need to return to the question or topic.

3. We repeat efforts to respond to the call: Yun Men's attempts were rejected three times. He simply returned and tried again. In the metaphor, the number of times is not critical; rather, persistent intent to find the response is what is important. The koan is silent about all but the persistence, indicating that all else is secondary. Whatever has happened during past attempts at individuation, whether perceived to be successful or unsuccessful, we return anew to respond to this call today. In the therapy office, a patient may sincerely make repeated and unsuccessful attempts to respond genuinely to a question by the therapist, even as the therapist keeps asking for something more. Alternatively, the therapist may intentionally or unconsciously avoid taking up a difficult topic raised by a patient; the patient provides another opening; and the therapist tries again to respond.
4. We take a risk: Yun Men put his leg in the door before it was slammed. Perhaps this was his first genuine expression of how much it meant to him to engage with Mu Chou. In the metaphor, willingness to risk the dissolution of the story we have created about ourselves is a necessary step toward individuation. Protecting our story of ourselves separates us from simply experiencing and expressing the fact of who we are right now. In a recent book, James Hollis wrote, ". . . the spirit of evil is negation of the life force by fear. Only boldness can deliver us from fear, and if the risk is not taken, the meaning of life is violated" (2009, 11). For a patient or a therapist, the risk may seem so great that he or she lets session minutes pass, waiting for the right time, the right way to bring up that difficult topic. Progress on the point can only begin when one is in a position of vulnerability. For example, until a patient finds a way to say, "It hurt my feelings when you said . . ." a therapist cannot engage, respond, or repair.
5. We give an intimate response: The door slammed on Yun Men's leg, and there was no separation between Yun Men and his expression in the moment. The pain cut through all Yun Men's explanations and expectations for the meeting, and his response was honed down to one statement; "OOWWWW!" His mind was opened. As in the metaphor of the story, we can understand the greater ease of this experience of the immediate in the extremes of life. For example, when present for the awe of birth and death, one frequently experiences freedom from the filters that evoke our hesitation. Similarly to Yun Men, when we are in physical pain it may be easier to release intellectual concerns; the same can be true of psychic pain. But the metaphor can hold true for any expressions that are

genuine to the facts of this moment. An intimate response often cuts through any ambiguity or confusion. It can be as ordinary as a sincerely expressed, "I'm sorry," or as dramatic as, "Please, stop yelling at me!" When truly found, the intimate response originates in the unique self and clears the air.

An additional koan and a story reinforce the importance of this mythic topic in Zen. "A monk asked Yun Men, 'What are the teachings of a whole lifetime?' Yun Men said, 'An appropriate statement'" (Cleary, 1992, 94). And from *The Record of Lin-Chi*: [our] "... eminent predecessors ... all had their own way of saving men ... what I want to point out to you is that you must not accept the deluding views of others. If you want to act, then act. Don't hesitate" (Sasaki 1975, 7).

The first of these is a koan taken from an exchange with the same Yun Men of the koan with Mu Chou, but this question about the "teaching of a lifetime" occurred when Yun Men was a teacher later in his life. When asked to sum up his Zen teaching, he recalled his early experience with Mu Chou, which goes back to the idea of our response to the encounter now before us. In application to individuation, we can hear in this that Yun Men denied any sweeping generalizations, grand or otherwise; instead, he said, simply speak to the circumstances. Perhaps he would tell us today not to distract ourselves with our level of individuation or development; after all, there is only this statement, the choice of the action before us now. And the words of Lin-Chi, who died in Tang-dynasty China in 866 CE, still resonate in the West today. Lin-Chi's advice to avoid the deluding views of others is similar to Jung's description of individuation as "becoming one's own self" and is here linked to acting without hesitation.

All these myths encourage us to find our own voice and action and to express ourselves without wavering. Other koans beyond the scope of this article further address how one works toward the intimate response and how one looks for the expression of essential self at this time and in these circumstances.

Beyond Concepts

The story of Yun Men and Mu Chou and the other koans exhibit an absence of explanation or conceptualization. In this way, Zen and koans are consistent with Jung's distrust of intellectual concepts applied to the psyche:

Mythological ideas with their extraordinary symbolism evidently reach far into the human psyche and touch the historical foundations where reason, will and good intentions never penetrate; for these ideas are born of the same depths and speak a language which strikes an answering chord in the inner man, although our reason may not understand it. (1954, CW 16, ¶¶18–19)

In addition, in Jung's exploration of the unconscious, he warns that we should "not stray too far in the direction of abstract intellectualism: hence we are best advised

to remain within the framework of traditional mythology . . .” (1954, CW 16, ¶478). Zen explicitly applies these cautions about the use of intellectual concepts to all of Zen practice, as in the following story:

When Counselor Wang visited Lin-Chi at his monastery, the Counselor asked whether the monks read the sutras [the record of the Buddha’s teaching]. Lin-Chi said, “No.” The Counselor then asked whether the monks learned meditation. Again, Lin-Chi said, “No, they don’t learn meditation.” The Counselor then asked, “If they neither read the sutras nor learn meditation, what in the world are they doing?” Lin-Chi responded, “All I do is make them become Buddhas and Patriarchs.” The Counselor then said, “Though gold dust is valuable, in the eyes it causes blindness.” Lin-Chi responded, “Until now I thought you were an ordinary fellow.” (Adapted from Sasaki 1975, 45)

This myth demonstrates the avoidance of words and concepts in the extreme. The conversation occurred in a monastery, in which there was doubtlessly a room appointed for meditation. In a traditional Japanese monastery, bells and instruments would also have been visible for use during the chanting of sutras. Yet Lin-Chi answered “no” to the questions about whether these activities were occurring, denying the words and concepts. Lin-Chi consciously avoided being trapped by concepts, even those seemingly at the heart of the activities at hand, and instead offered the actions themselves to express the pregnant symbolism that can so easily be lost with words. And his guest apparently understood that we can lose sight of the moon when distracted by the words that serve as the finger pointing to the moon.

The koan in case ninety of the *Book of Equanimity* is perhaps even more succinct. In it is the following text:

Kyozan had a dream in which he went to Maitreya’s place and sat in the second seat. The Venerable One said, “Today it is time for the one in the second seat to speak.” At that Kyozan stood up, struck the sounding post and said, “The Dharma of the Mahayana is beyond all words. I respectfully declare it.” (Wick 2005, 286)

The avoidance of conceptualization can be found in modern Vietnamese Buddhist practice as well. In *Interbeing: Commentary on the Tiep Hien Precepts*, Thich Nhat Hanh presents the precepts of his order. The first precept includes the sentence, “Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, ideology, even Buddhist ones.” The second includes, “Truth is found in life and not merely conceptual knowledge. Be ready to learn throughout your life and to observe reality in yourself and in the world at all times” (1987, 27, 30).

With all our words, however profound or provocative, we can easily lose the depth of true experience, like confusing the description of a wonderful meal on a menu with the taste itself. In the therapy office and elsewhere in life, saying “I’m in pain” can be a world apart from a soulful moan. But avoidance of the trap of conceptualization in therapy can also be the avoidance of narrow definitions of what the therapy experience

“should” look like, for the patient and the therapist. If either holds an idea that he or she is strong, then weeping is not allowed. If either can rest in the fact of who he or she is in this moment, strong or weak, then there is no need for the descriptive word; there is just freedom to speak or act appropriately. Even the words “therapist,” “patient,” and “Jungian” have the potential to close doors, just as they may open them.

Relationships in Koans

When mining Zen koans for insights into individuation, it is also important to consider what is not addressed in this source. The koans just discussed demonstrate an explicit attention to aspects of individuation related to awareness of the immediate, individual experience and expression, as well as avoidance of conceptualization. Interpersonal relationships, however, are less explicitly addressed in koans, though it is more difficult to demonstrate the absence of something, especially in a body of work as broad and fluid as Zen koans. It may also be that relational issues arose and were/are dealt with in other ways in Asian monastic tradition that have not been relocated to the West. Still, in the experience of the author and in a review of three major collections of koans (*The Wu-men Kuan*, *The Blue Cliff Record*, and *The Book of Equanimity*), relatively few koans are found that explicitly provide tools for the relational tensions between friends and lovers (Aitken 1990; Cleary 1992; Wick 2005).

The nature of relationship in koans can be illustrated with another myth taken from the twenty-third case in the *Wu-Men Kuan* collection (Aitken 1990). In the story, Hui-neng was an uneducated man from a poor family whose mind was opened when he overheard a monk on the street reciting the Diamond Sutra (traditionally believed to be the orally transmitted words of the Buddha). Hui-neng was so moved by the experience that he travelled across China to study at the Huang-mei monastery where the monk had been. Hui-neng had worked in the kitchen for several months when the teacher of the monastery decided that it was time he passed on his robe and bowl, symbolically indicating the selection of a successor. The position was to be decided by a contest of poems; entries were submitted by Ming, the head monk and apparent front runner, and Hui-neng. The teacher selected Hui-neng, making him the sixth in the Chinese Buddhist lineage following Bodhidharma (who is traditionally credited with bringing Buddhism from India to China). However, the teacher knew that Ming would be so jealous that he gave the robe and bowl to Hui-neng in private with the advice to flee, which he did. But when Ming caught up with him, Hui-neng placed the robe and bowl on a rock nearby. In the translation by Robert Aitken, Hui-neng said the following as Ming approached:

This robe represents the Dharma. There should be no fighting over it. You may take it with you. Ming tried to lift it up, but it was as immovable as a mountain. Shivering and trembling, he said, “I came for the Dharma, not for the robe. I beg you, lay brother, please

open the Way for me.” The teacher said, “Don’t think good, don’t think evil. At this very moment what is the original face of Ming the head monk?” In that instant Ming had great satori. Sweat ran from his entire body. In tears he made his bows saying, “Besides these secret words and secret meanings, is there anything of further significance?” The teacher said, “What I have just conveyed to you is not secret. If you reflect on your own face, whatever is secret will be right there with you.” Ming said, “. . . I am like someone who drinks water and knows personally whether it is cold or warm. Lay brother, you are now my teacher.” The teacher said, “If you can say that, then let us both call Huang-mei our teacher. Maintain your realization carefully.” (Aitken 1990, 147)

Again there is an explicit reference to the very individual transformation possible when we release concepts, even those such as good and evil, and, without judgment or evaluation, look simply at the fact of ourselves right now. The last line of the koan makes a related point. “Maintain your realization carefully” reinforces the immediacy of individuation. Hui-neng reminded Ming that his experience was not a diploma that could be relied upon forever but something requiring repeated attention. Applying this advice to individuation implies that “coming to selfhood” (Jung’s description of individuation) is a continuous activity.

This story also includes a component of relational tension and implied threat. The original teacher in the myth abrogated authority over Ming’s behavior. By suggesting that Hui-neng flee the walls of the monastery, the original teacher symbolically indicated that resolution of the emotional and relational differences between the two men must be found outside the form of the practice. (Perhaps the seeds of the separation of relationship and practice can be found in the story of the Buddha’s early life; the Buddha left his wife and child to begin his own search for understanding.) Although improvement in social skills may be inherent in individuation through increased comfort with one’s self, nevertheless, the traditional koan practice does not offer tools for social skills or for relational dynamics in the explicit manner with which it offers tools for individual transformation.

The prioritization of individual transformation over relational dynamics in traditional Zen practice can also be found in a koan involving the dynamic Japanese teacher Hakuin and a baby:

As the story goes, a man came before Hakuin, bringing his unmarried daughter and her newborn baby with him. With anger and pain he addressed the respected master, “My daughter has born this child out of wedlock and shamed herself and my family. She also has informed us that you are the father of this baby. You, who have talked so about integrity! What do you have to say?” Hakuin responded, “Is that so?” Although it was not his child, and although he was being personally accused of a serious transgression, he said nothing to defend himself. In time the news got out, and the donations necessary for maintaining the monastery dried up; students left, but Hakuin stayed and cared for the baby. After a year the man returned with his daughter, this time respectful and apologetic. He said, “Master Hakuin, I now understand from my daughter that you were not the father

of the baby. Please accept my apologies. She used your name to protect another.” Hakuin replied, “Is that so?” (Adapted from Repps and Senzaki 1998, 22; and other sources)

The lesson he gave was a demonstration of nonattachment so profound that it has inspired generations: How can I be offended if there is no one to give or take offense? The story also illustrates someone who chooses to act autonomously, whether as his own expression or as a teaching (or both), rather than attending to the many relational issues that arose. For example, was separation from the mother and family the best choice for the infant?

These examples demonstrate why it is appropriate that there is Buddhist practice and, separately, psychotherapy practice. Many Buddhist practitioners seek counseling; why would they if Buddhist practice was itself sufficient for all needs? Similarly, many psychotherapists and their patients participate in Buddhist (and similar) practices; why would they if psychotherapy was sufficient in itself? It is notable that these conclusions are drawn from ancient koans most clearly associated with traditional Zen practice. Other Buddhist practices are more explicitly attentive to relational issues. And in current Western Zen practice, many psychotherapists are also Buddhist teachers who could be changing the practice now.

Note also that no black-and-white distinction can be made here. In Zen tradition, gratitude is frequently expressed for the “three treasures”—Buddha (the historical Buddha and/or realization now), Dharma (truth, or path and teaching), and Sangha (community). The third of these indicates the importance of relationship in traditional practice, though not necessarily explicit in koan myths. In addition, there are myths that address the ambiguities that can arise from the fundamental perspective that all attachment should be released, as demonstrated in this paraphrased koan: A student asked the master to explain the concept of impermanence. “All things are temporary, change is inevitable, and our suffering arises from our attachment to things and resistance to change. . . .” the Master answered. “Good,” said the student, “because I just broke your favorite tea bowl.”

Clearly students hearing that koan are intended to understand that using the fundamental perspectives (nonattachment, “emptiness”) to avoid responsibility in a worldly way is an inappropriate use of practice. In this story, for example, remorse and apology might have been a better response relationally. Also, clearly the Zen tradition includes stories that can be understood to address relational issues; however, the frequency of these stories is low, and priorities are generally elsewhere.

Conclusions and Clinical Applications

As psychotherapists fostering individuation, we wait like the hermit Mu Chou for our patients to knock on our doors. With our questions and our faith in their

natural ability to self discover, we ask for their genuine response. In affirming this faith, Jung said, “. . . the law of life always tends toward a life individually lived” (1934/1954, CW 17, ¶307). As psychotherapists we are also Yun Men, as our patients demand our response to their questions, sometimes overt, sometimes implied: “Do you love me?” “What do you think I should do?” The story of Yun Men and Mu Chou tells us that we don’t necessarily have to get it right the first time, nor does our patient. Even when forcefully rejected because of a response we’ve given, we succeed through persistence by returning again and again to the process.

In considering Yun Men’s process of individuation, five steps were enumerated. For those seeking individuation in a clinical setting, we can focus the question by examining which of the five steps present barriers in their lives. But in the end, the attention returns to “an appropriate response” to this circumstance now. In the context of the therapy room, this suggests that both therapist and patient avoid conceptualization and need not burden themselves with distinctions of levels of individuation. Instead, the focus is more immediate and specific: to speak genuinely now. And even if a wonderful response is given, the wheel keeps turning, and the demand for another response occurs again.

Seemingly contrary to this focus on the present, an appropriate response to current circumstances may be to encourage a patient by giving examples that demonstrate his or her progress in individuation over time. To refuse to do so when appropriate (however judged), would be to allow concepts or theories about acting in the present to strangle the immediate and genuine response. Practically, this makes the work in the therapy office much more difficult—rules cannot be relied upon without our constant attention. Avoidance of theories and concepts means that the work is consistently created anew, at least to some degree. Traditional shakuhachi flute music can be a model for this work. Although this music sounds improvisational, the player is tasked with repeating pieces written long ago but making them fully the player’s own in the present. Similarly, the avoidance of concepts in the therapeutic setting can encompass both a completely new and personal expression, as well as a personal expression of something old made new once again. Thus, even with Jungian perspectives, the therapist’s task is to make them her or his own with each patient.

Intellectual theories may be more likely to inhibit the individual (patient or psychotherapist) after he or she has been involved in therapy for some time and has perceptions of progress or a self concept of how an “individuated person” appears. The work is more likely to be impeded by concepts of individuation as they become stale, as one becomes rigid in one’s expectations, or as one becomes narrow in the approaches taken. When individuation itself becomes the barrier to genuine experience, then the stories (and message) about release of concepts can be particularly helpful.

Approaches derived from these myths tend to address personal transformation or individuation. While the manner of individuation presented in the koans may sometimes

involve relational issues, issues outside their scope occur. For example, if a person's relationships are difficult because that person does not know what he or she thinks and feels, fails to speak up for himself or herself, and thus does not reveal himself or herself enough to develop connections with others, then the koans about finding one's voice may be directly applicable. If, however, a person knows exactly how he or she feels—angry—and how to express it—accusatorily—but is less aware of the response of the recipient from these heartfelt expressions, a myth about finding one's voice may not be salient. In this second instance, other myths may be more helpful to the individual.

One final similarity can be found between working with Zen koans and practicing psychotherapy in the tradition of Jung. When presented with a koan, the recipient's challenge is to make the ancient story his or her story today. Almost fifty years after Jung's death, a practitioner in his tradition also carries the challenge of taking the essential elements of Jung's methods and expressing them as the practitioner's own today.

ENDNOTES

1. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2010, s.v. "myth," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myth>.
2. Oxford English Online Dictionary, 2010, s.v. "myth," <http://dictionary.oed.com>.

NOTE

References to *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* are cited in the text as CW, volume number, and paragraph number. *The Collected Works* are published in English by Routledge (UK) and Princeton University Press (USA).

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ABSTRACT

Individuation, the process of human development, was frequently cited by Jung and was of obvious importance in his conception of analytic work. Individuation has also been frequently cited in works comparing and contrasting Jungian psychology and Buddhism. However, rather than comparing or contrasting Jungian analysis and Buddhism, in this article, Jung's methods of seeking wisdom in myth are applied to Zen koans to explore the process of individuation. Koans, stories of encounters between Zen practitioners, are myth-like in their ancient history and resonance across time and culture. Their concise form is rich with archetypal imagery, which, in some stories, provides perspective on the process of individuation. In this article, koans are shown to identify and emphasize the experience of individuation, rather than its intellectual conceptualization. The paper also discusses the limits of the clinical application of using koans as myths to inform the process of individuation, as exemplified by their emphasis on personal transformation rather than relational issues.

KEY WORDS

archetype, Buddhism, folktales, Hakuin, Hui-neng, individuation, Jung, koan, Mu Chou, myth, mythology, non-conceptualization, relationship, transformation, Wu-Men Kuan, Yun Men, Zen