Theology of Self Care

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Overview of Jung’s Concept of the Religious Function

For Jung, the task of life is to grow into the wholeness of self, and he termed this process individuation.

It is part of the essence of our human nature to ‘love God’ through that wholeness. Our psyche is built to function in relation to the divine. Jung called the part of ourselves that has the capacity to relate with God, our ‘religious function’.

Connections Between Religious Function and Self-Care:

1. When my religious function is operational, I am in relationship with God, and that allows for optimum care of the self.
2. Taking care of our religious function is of primary importance in self-care.
“The religious function of the psyche, according to Jung, can be described as a drive for clear relation of the personal self to the transpersonal source of meaning and power of being.”

Ann Ulanov, p.88

Three indicators that the Religious Function exists:

1. We as humans have a natural instinct to grow toward wholeness
2. Loss of religious meaning leads to neurosis
3. In our dreams, images sometimes appear that fill us with awe and make us feel our connection with the divine

Two main aspects to the religious function:

- **Its purpose:** facilitating our natural urge towards relating with God
- **Its means:** our natural capacity to produce symbols through which we experience God and grow into wholeness

The Function of Symbols in our Relationship with the Holy

1. Symbols help *translate* our own experience of the transcendent to us.
2. Symbols help us *process* our experiences of the transcendent, so that they can nourish us.
3. Symbols help us *communicate* our experiences of the transcendent with other people.
How Do We Take Care of Our Religious Function?

1. Take careful consideration and account of whatever seems powerful and meaningful to you in the world. (levav)

2. Worship and love whatever is beautiful and meaningful to you. (nefesh -- Ignatius)

3. Take careful account of the symbols produced by the unconscious (me’od)

4. Have faith in your inner experience.

Can we trust that our own religious experience will connect us with what is true, even if it might seem that we have to step away from ‘religion’ to get there?

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

--Matthew 16:24

“Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."

--Mark 8:35

To consider:
Submission and sacrifice are authentic, meaningful, deeply mature acts. But they are only as authentic and meaningful and mature as the person offering them.
Moral Masochism: The Anti-Self-Care Tendency

Freudian concept of moral masochism: The tendency of a person to submit her ego to a sadistic superego operating within herself.

Some signs of this tendency:
1. If an inner voice is constantly criticizing you
2. If you side with that voice
3. If you make yourself ‘small’ and insignificant in various ways (which can mask itself as humility, but it is NOT humility)
4. If you believe suffering is inherently morally superior to joy
5. If you consciously or unconsciously heap suffering upon yourself.

The Difference Between Moral Masochism and True Religious Submission

Maturity
“The moral masochist’s acts of so-called ‘submission’ and ‘service’ conceal his evasions of the work of forming an ego identity for which he would have to take responsibility. He would rather submit to another as a surrogate ego than develop an ego of his own.”

Religion and the Unconscious
Ann & Barry Ulanov, p. 177

Love
The anti-self-care tendency has its roots in self-fear rather than self-love.
Aggression and Moral Masochism

When aggression is accessible to the ego, it can function as our life-force, our self-assertion, our capacity to live into our me’od (all of who we are). We thus have the energy and freedom and autonomy to make choices and live in the world.

In moral masochism, our aggression is being channeled to our super-ego. That is why the voice is so persistent and so loud and so strong. Our me’od is being diverted and used against us.

The Consequences of Moral Masochism

“It is the lack of love of the moral masochist either for himself or for others, and his inability to receive it from anyone, that together lead, if unchecked, to self-annihilation. This is one of the most painful, long-drawn-out, and incessant of self-destructive processes. The drive to self-assertion is twisted into a dogmatic insistence on one’s failures. One takes pride in the battle fought against the self. One falls into an obsessive dread of the good, so that all the good things that do come to one are self-righteously taxed by guilt.”

Religion and the Unconscious
Ann & Barry Ulanov, p. 177
How Do We Shift Our Energies From self-attack to self-care?

a) Psychologically: The aggression that fuels that voice needs to be claimed by the ego, so that we can use it to claim our inner spontaneity, and to live out of our autonomy.

b) Theologically: we make room for God to love us.

LOVE bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lack'd anything.

'A guest,' I answer'd, 'worthy to be here:'
Love said, 'You shall be he.'
'I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on Thee.'
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
'Who made the eyes but I?'

'Truth, Lord; but I have marr'd them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.'
'And know you not,' says Love, 'Who bore the blame?' 15
'My dear, then I will serve.'
'You must sit down,' says Love, 'and taste my meat.'
So I did sit and eat.

George Herbert. 1593–1632