

HOME RETREAT – Living your Unlived Life 10.10.20

Suggested Timetable (But do make your own)

- 11.00 Talk – Living Your Unlived Life
- 11.30 Read through the talk again.
- 11.45 Coffee break
- 12.00 – 13.00 Look at Appendix 1 & 2 and try the questions
- 13.00 – 14.00 Lunch break
- 14.00 – 16.00 Siesta/Leisure/Gardening
- 16.00 Tea break
- 16.15 – 18.00 Choose any of Appendices 3-5 to read and to do the exercise.
- 18.00 Vespers Live stream from the Abbey
- 18.30 Supper break
- 20.15 Compline Live stream from the Abbey

Recommended Books:

Inner Work – Using dreams and Active Imagination for Personal Growth - by Robert A Johnson

Living Your Unlived Life – Coping with Unrealised Dreams and Fulfilling your Purpose in the Second half of life – by Robert A Johnson

The Gift of Years – Growing older Gracefully – By Joan Chittester

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Living the Unlived Life

Good morning and a warm welcome to Home Retreats. My name is Fr Christopher.

Some three months ago, I did a Retreat called Respect for the Seniors, and mentioned a suggestion for those in this 8th Stage of Human Development, that they practice Living the Unlived Life. In this retreat, I would like to contextualise this, by asking what is the meaning of this stage of life in our further development as Human Beings? Erik Erikson had suggested that a choice needs to be made in this 8th stage, between Integrity and Despair. I am going to assume that most of us would prefer to be more integrated, than to slide into despair at the end of our lives.

To move towards greater integrity or integration, we can ask: What is this last stage FOR? What is its purpose? Indeed, I have found myself asking more frequently, what is Life about? And the process of beginning to **answer these questions**, could set us off on a whole new journey. In practical terms we could start with our story, and there are different aspects of our story. There are the simple facts of where we were born, who are parents were, where we lived, whether we had brothers and sisters, where did we go to school. I could go on. These are the public story on the surface of our lives. We could take it in chunks of ten or fifteen years and note the significant moments. And there could be other stories – the story of our faith, or the story of our relationships, or we could blend them altogether and see how one influenced the other. By telling these stories a meaning might begin to emerge, or we might notice gaps, opportunities missed, a life unlived. I have recently taken up a book by an interpreter of Jungian psychology called 'Living your Unlived Life'. The author, Robert A Johnson, has teamed up with another clinical psychologist Jerry Ruhl, to reflect on the great Myth of Castor and Pollux, the Gemini Twins. Their suggestion is that we start off united, like the twins, but that our choices, in order to fit in with our Culture, separate us from our other half – so, to take an obvious example, in order to become a monk, I had to choose not to be married. We then live with the ache, perhaps even the pain of what it might have been like to be married. This is not just indulging our fantasies or dreams, but of dealing with a **part of ourselves which might have been fulfilled very differently by a married relationship**. This can also apply not simply to life choices, but also to states of being, for example; can you imagine, during racial tension in your country, what life might have been like being African instead of European, or while searching for a job, if you were a woman instead of a man. The suggestion of our authors is that we spend much of our life with a yearning to be whole and united once again, and they give us a way of approaching this wholeness without doing ourselves or others damage, or without ending our lives in resentment or regrets.

To do this we can dialogue with our separated self, our other half. We use a technique of Active Imagination. We can also follow a number of exercises which help us to discern our unlived life and begin the process of dialogue. I can give you an example if we go back to childhood and how we came into the world. In the first place, we may have had to deal with some of the unlived life of our parents. Mine were not married until WWII ended in 1945, with all its war-time trauma and aftermath. On top of that, I was born during the bloody riots in Calcutta, leading up to India's traumatic Independence and Partition. To add another more personal layer, my mother was diagnosed with polio just before my birth and I was induced a month early. So, my coming into the world was far from tranquil, if it ever is. The scars of that time must be

there, and the question is, can I dialogue with the unlived life I never had, without all those particular circumstances to encounter? In one sense, the unlived life is a speculation. We lived what we lived. But, the way we had to live, given the circumstances, produced various complexes in our personality and it is these complexes with which we can set up a dialogue. I will insert a few thoughts about complexes in an Appendix.

I remember a powerful workshop which I did during a course in Dublin, called Family Reconstruction. It was during this, nine years after my father's death, that I was actually able to grieve. Circumstances at the time had made it almost impossible – but during this workshop the tears were able to flow freely. This was unlived life being finally expressed. I can describe more of this workshop, but it should only be undertaken in a group with professional help.

Johnson is really asking us in this period of reflection, to face our Shadow side. In traditional Catholic terms this might include our 'sins' of the past which may have lain heavy upon us for years. We can certainly use Active Imagination and dialogue with the person or persons injured, or write to them if they are no longer alive or available. This can begin to heal the hurts and damage. This may help me begin to face aspects of myself which have formed mini-personalities in my psyche, which are not really me, nor do I want them to be me. The truer self, which means me without these other selves, is what Johnson is calling my unlived life. So, we could say that the unlived life is the truer life we could be living, as well as the different life, which was excluded by my various life-choices. This 'different' life is clearly more speculative and we may need to use more imagination, but it can still remain rooted in reality and be connected with the person we know we are.

This dialogue with our unlived life is certainly a task which we could engage with during these years, in which reflection plays a prominent part. But behind the task there is an insight into the meaning of this process and the meaning of these years. It is the furthering of that integration of our person so that we become more whole, more rounded, less abrasive, less self-centred, ironically, because more accepting of ourselves. We know ourselves better, and even begin to love ourselves as God loves us – not as perfect people, but as real people, true people, integrated people. Such a person does not project their unlived life onto others and make life more difficult for them. Such a person can BE more loving to others and truly serve them in these final years, and does that not contribute to life's meaning and purpose?

From another perspective, Joan Chittester puts it like this: The world had been upside down for so long, it is almost impossible to believe anymore that the meaning of life is NOT about doing. The notion that it is about BEING – being caring, being interested, being honest, being truthful, being available, being spiritual, being involved with the important things of life, - is so rare, so unspoken of, as to be obtuse. We don't even know what meaning means anymore. Again at the end of each Chapter of her book, Joan puts together a little aphorism:

A burden of these years is that we might allow ourselves to believe that not being as fast or as busy as we used to be, is some kind of human deficiency.

A blessing of these years is that we can come to understand that it is the quality of what we think and say that makes us valuable members of society, not how fast or busy we are.

Reflection:

What are your hopes for your 8th Stage of Development – your last years?

What are your fears for those last years?

'Life is but a prolonged preparation for death' – what do you make of this suggestion?

What regrets do you have already, looking back over your life?

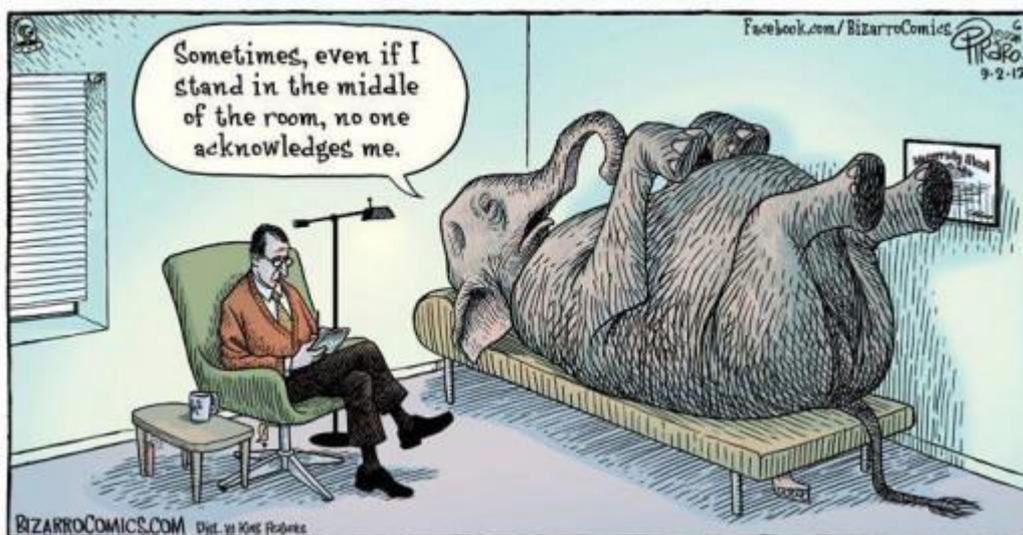
Having heard this retreat, what might be done about them?

Appendix 1 Complexes

Complex. An emotionally charged group of ideas or images.

A complex is the *image* of a certain psychic situation which is strongly accentuated emotionally and is, moreover, incompatible with the habitual attitude of consciousness.

The *via regia* to the unconscious ... is not the dream, as Freud thought, but the complex, which is the architect of dreams and of symptoms. Nor is this *via* so very "royal," either, since the way pointed out by the complex is more like a rough and uncommonly devious footpath.



Formally, complexes are "feeling-toned ideas" that over the years accumulate around certain archetypes, for instance "mother" and "father." When complexes are constellated, they are invariably accompanied by **affect**. They are always relatively autonomous.

Complexes interfere with the intentions of the will and disturb the conscious performance; they produce disturbances of memory and blockages in the flow of associations; they appear and disappear according to their own laws; they can temporarily obsess consciousness, or influence speech and action in an unconscious way. In a word, complexes behave like independent beings.

Complexes are in fact "splinter psyches." The aetiology of their origin is frequently a so-called trauma, an emotional shock or some such thing, that splits off a bit of the psyche. Certainly one of the commonest causes is a moral conflict, which ultimately derives from the apparent impossibility of affirming the whole of one's nature. Everyone knows nowadays that people

“have complexes.” What is not so well known, though far more important theoretically, is that complexes can *have us*.

Jung stressed that complexes in themselves are not negative; only their effects often are. In the same way that atoms and molecules are the invisible components of physical objects, complexes are the building blocks of the psyche and the source of all human emotions.

Complexes are focal or nodal points of psychic life which we would not wish to do without; indeed, they should not be missing, for otherwise psychic activity would come to a fatal standstill.

Complexes obviously represent a kind of inferiority in the broadest sense ... but to have complexes does not necessarily indicate inferiority. It only means that something discordant, unassimilated, and antagonistic exists, perhaps as an obstacle, but also as an incentive to greater effort, and so, perhaps, to new possibilities of achievement.

Some degree of one-sidedness is unavoidable, and, in the same measure, complexes are unavoidable too.

The negative effect of a complex is commonly experienced as a distortion in one or other of the psychological functions (feeling, thinking, intuition and sensation). In place of sound judgment and an appropriate feeling response, for instance, one reacts according to what the complex dictates. As long as one is unconscious of the complexes, one is liable to be driven by them.

The possession of complexes does not in itself signify neurosis ... and the fact that they are painful is no proof of pathological disturbance. Suffering is not an illness; it is the normal counter-pole to happiness. A complex becomes pathological only when we think we have not got it

Identification with a complex, particularly the **anima/animus** and the shadow, is a frequent source of neurosis. The aim of **analysis** in such cases is not to get rid of the complexes – as if that were possible – but to minimize their negative effects by understanding the part they play in behaviour patterns and emotional reactions.

A complex can be really overcome only if it is lived out to the full. In other words, if we are to develop further we have to draw to us and drink down to the very dregs what, because of our complexes, we have held at a distance.

CW = Collected Works – CG Jung

For a longer Read about Complexes and archetypes Try

<https://www.thesap.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/complexes-archetypes.pdf>

Appendix 2

A Psalm to pray or to use for Lectio Divina

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;

you discern my thoughts from far away.
³ You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.
⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.
⁷ Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"
¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶ Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.
¹⁷ How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
¹⁸ I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
I come to the end[Ⓜ]—I am still with you.
¹⁹ O that you would kill the wicked, O God,
and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—
²⁰ those who speak of you maliciously,
and lift themselves up against you for evil![Ⓜ]

- ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
- ²² I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.
- ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
- ²⁴ See if there is any wicked^[a] way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.^[a]

Appendix 3&4

<https://www.sunypress.edu/pdf/61850.pdf>

<http://69.39.227.160/articles/summer13-the-sage.pdf>

Appendix 5

This is an Exercise in Robert Johnson's book which you could try.

Dissolving the Split Perspective: An Exercise.

Choose a polarity in your life that you want to explore such as work and play, love and power, dutifulness and spontaneity. Take a sheet of paper and on one side create a drawing that represents one of the poles you have chosen. Then turn the sheet over and make a drawing on the opposite side representing the other pole. Don't worry about the artistic quality of your drawings, just let your hand move freely. If you are overly self-conscious try drawing with your non-dominant hand.

Notice how the two poles of this opposition in your life are facing each other. Imagine an interaction going on between them, then take a clean sheet of paper and draw an interaction of the figures or images allow them to intermix. This may take the form of a clash or tentative dialogue or distant communication. Continue drawing on new sheets of paper allowing this dialogue of opposites to evolve. The elements in your drawings may begin to change spontaneously.

When a synthesis appears in a new drawing, ask yourself what it represents, and be aware of the inner state that produced the image. Then reflect on how this new synthesis could manifest in your life.

Thank you for Participating!