

## RIDDLES AS A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGICAL PHENOMENON IN FOLKLORE: MYTHS, FAIRY-TALES, PERSONAL LITERATURE ART

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**Abstract:** The paper is an attempt to review riddles as a community psychological phenomenon, through the point of view of the analytical psychology of C. G. Jung, M. Eliade, E. Durkheim's conception about sacred and profane and the conception of S. Arieti about concept and endoconcept.

There is also a review of neck riddles as similar to the ritual of initiation, fortune telling, other community phenomena, and as a way to reach individuation, the Self.

**Key words:** riddle, neck riddle, sacred, profane, community psychological phenomenon, concept, endoconcept, folklore, fortune telling, symbol, game

### RIDDLES AS A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGICAL PHENOMENON. CHARACTERISTICS FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF ANALYTICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Community psychological phenomena are about attitudes, processes, and substances of the collective unconscious or the collective conscious – with roots in the collective unconscious that appear in different activities, fields of community life, or in personal activities. The form of these phenomena is connected with the historical moment in which they appear, but as a sense and substance, as a pattern and a code, they are out of their contemporary time. So, they could be compared with an image without a face or substance without a shape. According to the theory of analytical psychology, the collective unconscious is a part of the personality structure. It appears in dreams, in symptoms of psychological diseases – hallucinations, visions, ideas, voices, attitudes –, and takes different shapes and forms. But community psychological phenomena appear in community life as well, in contacts and communication, lifestyle, and could be objectively found in different activities – culture, religion, folklore, prejudice, rituals, alchemy, science, and riddles.

Riddles in different sources could be considered a community psychological phenomenon. They could be regarded as a specific kind of contact – between the Dragon and the Hero, between the Witch and the one who is lost in the forest; the key to riddles opens the doors to unknown secrets, ancient treasures, or doom. Successfully to the future can pass only those who can find the right answer. To solve the riddle is to say something that you think you have always known but have never ‘seen’ this way before; to perceive the things from a new point of view – the view of the asked question. This ‘seeing again’ is going through the metaphoric language of the riddle, accepting its rules; to go through the rational, daily level to a symbolical metalevel. But also to return from there to the rational world, bringing new answers for the world.

Riddle is a compendious way to look at the world, in which only the most important thing has a meaning; it is to experience the archetype (‘...the archetype could be extracted by abstractions of a class of experienced images or objects’, Korsini 1998: 18). In other words – it is the transformation of the unconscious to the conscious, because to solve a riddle is to ‘translate’ its symbol into rational language. The word, which is the answer to a riddle, is from ‘our world’, it is visible, conscious and rational, but the question is about an archetype (‘abstractions of one class’), formed with only a few words. The Hero who passes through this kind of integration (between the conscious and the unconscious), accepting new contents in the conscious, now knows more about himself for the world, too. On the path to the crucial aim, which is often obscure and unknown, there are too many obstacles, all connected to integrate the unconscious, realizing new truths and growing – the greater the difficulties, the more willing a person is to accept them. Because knowledge is gained only through difficulty. Most often the path is the aim itself (or ‘the Self’). For the reader of the story this is especially true, because he goes ‘hand in hand’ with the Hero, in every step and adventure, and the reader’s gain is the Hero’s story. The Hero gets the Kingdom, the princess gets the gold or the glory, but for the reader the treasure is to experience the fairytale: its wisdom, emotion, ‘inner knowledge’, the passed experience, the heartbeat of the way things could happen, to make the outer and the inner become one.

Riddles are communication on a metalevel – I with I (the Self): the Hero, a symbol of the conscious, with whom the reader identifies himself, as well as with the Dragon, a part of the reader’s personality too, but the unconscious one, which the reader feels, but never knows completely. To get into the adventure is the hunger of self-knowledge, which, as Jung (2001: 71) says, is the most important human need; the answer of the riddle is to bring this knowledge to the conscious level; and only there it thoroughly belongs to the Hero.

Giving riddles responds to another human need: to accept the world by playing games that could be explained with the existence of an archetype of the game.

Only the correctly built question receives a wise answer, which makes the knowledge deeper. The wise answer lives in the right question. These are the riddles – conjunction (*conjunction*, to use the terminology of the alchemy) between the question and the answer, bringing them both (as the alchemic *vas*), leading to insight (the non-existing third); they have ‘equal parts of thesis and antithesis’ (definition of ‘symbol’, Samuels, Shorter, Plaut 1995: 162), combination of opposites, a symbol of the World (and the Self) – moving, but having only one core, center (the core for the World and mandala, the Self for the personality and the answer for the riddle). The reached insight is a step closer to the Self.

The play with riddles, near the fireplace in dark, given by an old man to a child, represents the exchange of experience between generations, but both sides are gaining knowledge in this game. The riddles are binding the generations together to experience the magic of the archetype. And the world is unveiled, rediscovering itself over and over again. This is the pleasure of the everlasting game of searching for the Self, building the right questions and answers, touching the archetype, feeling the numinous.

In folkloric sources, riddles are verbal, and do not occur in written speech. To tell a riddle is as if to create it, just now, for the first time. Riddles that are already known do not give pleasure and experience (just like the jokes that we already know, and according to Freud, in the creation of the jokes the main role has the primary process, but they are created by Ego (Brenner 1993: 126–128). Probably, according to Freud’s theory, riddles could be compared with jokes and wits, in having a conscious and an unconscious side). In psychoanalysis, active listening, unmasking, and turning one’s drives and attitudes from the unconscious level to the conscious share a lot of similarity with giving/solving riddles.

Solving riddles is very much like fortune telling (in Bulgarian there is even similarity in the way the words sound). Just like a fortuneteller who foresees what will happen, rejecting unnumbered variants of the reality, because the future is only one, the solver of a riddle refuses many possible answers, searching for the only one. And the fortuneteller, just like the solver of the riddle, connects visions, images, signs/symbols of one kind and type (synchronically), which are translated into the “real”, rational world, dressing them in suitable words relative to parts of the world. And the fortuneteller, just like the riddle solver can succeed only in case he has profound and multidimensional knowledge about the pattern of the world and the craft to search and weave the reached

answers in themselves. Because the only reality is the one that is reflected in us. They are the masters of the “bird sight”, the sense of the important things with access to the principles of the metaworld.

To create a riddle is to “dance” with the archetype – to learn perfectly its steps – events, phenomena, and objects, conjoined by the most important aspects of them. To follow the archetype is to know the things that do not belong to its class – they make the question incorrect and the answer impossible. The pleasure and the insight are gained when there is a perfect synchronization between the question and the answer – this is the only way the riddle can be true, complete and real. If there is any mistake, the magic is gone and the pleasure is lost. A riddle does not have any misconceptions, variants, or interpretations – it is a short but wholesome and complete description of a part of the world. Its power lies not in the rational, logical, conscious truth about the world, but it lies in the truth of the archetype and the feelings its experience incites. ‘Now I will ask you a riddle’ is an invitation to enter another world; an invitation for leaving the profane, everyday things. It is just like ‘Once upon a time...’ – the world around disappears, and those who communicate in this language are taken somewhere away, to another place in another world, in another time. A riddle, like a fairytale, does not give concrete, scientific knowledge about the world, but inspires a feeling about the pattern and the harmony of how the world sounds. It is an attempt to capture the archetype and its transformations into words, in which it is still ‘transparent’, without shape, alive.

### **DURKHEIM'S CONCEPT FOR 'PROFANE' AND 'SACRED'**

If we use Durkheim's concept (1998) about the separation of the world into “sacred” and “profane”, riddles could be divided in two groups. The groups are widely different. The riddles, that we can call ‘profane’ are like a test, a simple task with an answer, which is known before, it is learned (sometimes beforehand). They could be used at schools as a helpful way to learn more about geography, biology, etc. or prove a good method for examination. They do not share any similarity with riddles in folklore. The answers, the experience, the situations they are asked in are completely different. The two groups are built on the same schemes, patterns, but the meaning and the result, the aim, are different. For example, it is possible to compare ordinary and ritual dinner, ordinary and ritual dressing – same actions, but with a totally different meaning. Both are founded on the same archetype, but in the ‘sacred’ case we can feel it, we have the experience about the situation, we link it to existential

categories, giving a meaning for the One, the General, the Real one, the Primal situation. The symbol and numinosum lack in the 'profane' group. The symbols are turned into signs. The lack of the numinous and symbolic experience, the 'profanation' of the 'sacred' is one of the characteristics of the modern world, about which Jung wrote a great deal. Folklore riddles are not the ones which are given when someone is put to an ordinary, 'everyday' test (e.g., in the classroom); they are not already riddles, they become 'empty'.

The other group, the 'sacred' riddles, very often contains a big pledge – the life of the Hero, the aim of his way, his freedom, or destiny. These are called neck riddles. They all are the symbols of Self. Here the link between the conscious and the unconscious is very important; in the group of the 'profane' there is a dissociation between the conscious and the unconscious: the question and the answer are about rational objects, 'hidden' in preconscious, forgotten for the moment but easy to be reached.

## **NECK RIDDLES**

Neck riddles are a kind of riddles, in which the character's life depends on solving the riddle. In them, the one who answers, the Hero, has no going back. The "intellectual duel" in this type of riddles brings no entertainment but fear and sense for doom. The pledge is everything that the Hero is and has. From the viewpoint of analytical psychology, getting the Self is exactly the same. Just like the ritual of initiation (another community phenomenon): the old Self dies in order to be replaced by a new Self on a new, higher level. More often the "new" person has nothing in common with the old one. So these kinds of riddles are some kind of initiation. Just like Odin, the warrior, after nine days and nights hanged on Yggdrasil, had found the runes – after which he becomes a new person – filled with wisdom, wizard, and god.

In neck riddles the principle of getting the Self as a moment of initiation is very obvious. When the pledge is important – the biggest possible, even (or especially) the death of the old I, reaching the individuation, the Self, is the most important aim, then this kind of "intellectual duel" is not just a fear or entertainment that could be explained by usual feelings; it is numinous (a characteristic of the experience of the archetype, the unconscious), much more beyond the usual feelings. Just like the legend for Odin – this is a mission of sacrificing the I for the Self (the new, higher level of being, the individuation).

In many sources riddles are sacred. This could not be explained only with the enchantment of the archetype, but also with the 'returning to the Beginning of Times' (Eliade 1999). The contact between the giving and solving rid-

dles lies in another world. Giving riddles is a ritual. It cannot be happened in the rushing moments of everyday life, our usual communication (not like the sayings and parables which we can tell to someone even in the process of doing something else). When we ask riddles, there is a need to stop or change the point of view, to think, to feel, or to look around with different eyes. The riddles could only be asked in a situation of comfort, because they are always connected with the importance of a new discovery – noone can answer a riddle while doing something else. It requires going back to the beginning, inside, where the things are only principles without a shape, and when the answer is ready, the shape is done too. Riddles are almost always the contact between non-equals – young and old, Dragon and Hero, or someone who knows more than the other. So, according to this point of view, they are a symbol of the desire forwards and up, they are a symbol of the rebirthing experience, coming from eternity and going into it again; the experience, which will never be lost. So, they are an act of creation, similar to the Primal Creation, of Speech, which is the pattern of everything material. So, the riddle solver becomes a creator himself, finding the principle (archetype) inside, speaking and ‘making’ the object outside. The words/symbols of the riddle question are speech which creates only one object. Only the experienced words are creative. So this is both the ‘creative’ and educative side of riddles. They teach how we can create worlds, objects, and even more so – how to become creators ourselves. The answer to the riddle marks the beginning of a new life for those who answered – in him and in the world. So this is the way the man and the world become larger, because the man only sees what he knows and does not have any senses to recognize the things he does not know. And for the man, the world is his experience and knowledge.

If the object which is the key of the riddle is even physically in front of the eyes of the answerer, he could hardly guess that this is really it. Riddle language needs interpretation – the objects of the world turn in scheme with enlarged meanings – in symbols, signs and metaphors (in the figurative way), as the question is. When the key is insightfully found, it has to be translated again, to be returned into the ‘real’ world in the ‘material body’ of the object that it is about, in our ‘everyday’ language.

### **THE ANSWER, THE QUESTION AND THE AMBIGUITY**

The answers to riddles are unique. The answer is always one, with only one meaning. There is no place for projections and any kind of creation about the meaning of the answer – the answer is not what one would like to see in the

question. The creation is searching for the answer (to create the path which leads to the aim) and building the question. This is why even the enemy accepts the true answer – no matter that this could mean his fall. Because the truth (the reached aim) is what even your enemy cannot deny, but it is what is obligatory to be accepted by natural principle. A riddle must be soluble. The morality in communication in the language of riddles obliges not to use lies, tricks, saving the part of the truth or changing the conditions of this contest (the Hero with the Shadow) to reach the aim. The answer of the riddle is like a key, able to open only one single door: every riddle question has only one answer. These characteristics – to be true and unique – confirm the archetypal nature of riddles: they belong to a class, type of objects and phenomena, and in the process of ‘unveiling’ starting from the general to the concrete and unique. Just like the creation shown with the meanings of Kabbalah, where the beginning is the Chaos beyond the Veil (of not-shown), followed by the world of Ideas and after that – Malkhuth – the material, concrete world, with all of its permutations. The question of the riddle shapes the *vas* in which a concrete object will be poured. This scheme, this *vas* is about the archetype (it is not a concrete object itself).

Ambiguity is one of the most important characteristics of the unconscious. Jung talks about the truth of two mutually contradictory trends (for example, in Christianity a mother could be virgin; three is equal to one in the Trinity, etc.). Ambiguity exists in all the community phenomena, which have roots in the unconscious. In riddles, ambiguity is about the situation of asking the question: the one who asks keeps a secret (or treasure, or Kingdom, or wisdom, etc.), but at the same time the keeper must share or give it to the answerer (the Hero). The question is ambiguous: it must make things clear, but at the same time must confuse the answerer; the structure of the question is ambiguous, too: it is built not by the literal meanings of the words but of symbols (the symbol is ambiguous by nature; partly conscious, partly unconscious). So, to keep / to give; to clarify / to confuse; to ask / to tell. But the answer of a riddle is always only one – as the Self is a wholesome entity. This is the result of the initiation, individuation, ‘hierros gamos’, the Unity (between the conscious and the unconscious, between contradictions). According to analytical psychology, the Unity is the aim of the existence and the final, but not the last target for every quest (again and again). If the answer is ambiguous, it is not the Self, no whole One could be reached, the sacred initiation could not be fulfilled, the unity can not be done. Answering a riddle is as if to jump from one high rock to another – the one may only fall or pass.

This explanation does not only apply to neck riddles. The same applies to the tests, puzzles, crosswords and all the other (contemporary or not, profane

or sacred) types of riddles – none of the puzzle pieces can fit to more than one place in the entire picture. If there are two or more answers or the answer is ambivalent, the question is wrong, the riddle, the test or the puzzle is incorrectly built; no entertainment, satisfaction or ‘real work’ is done.

### **S. ARIETI'S CONCEPTION ABOUT THE 'CONCEPT' AND 'ENDOCEPT'**

We can use S. Arieti's concept (Gornev 1981: 103–114) to understand and describe the nature of the riddles. He uses the concept ‘endocept’, which is the unconscious variant of ‘concept’. It is so close to Freud's ‘primal process’ but it is about the motivational aspect of the process of creation, not about the sexual and aggressive drives. The ‘endocept’ is about the cognitive aspect of the unconscious. Some of the important characteristics of ‘endocept’ are:

1. Dynamic, unconscious memory; its other name is ‘clear meaning’; it has an inner trend to enlarge as the time passes.
2. The possibilities for connection among the ‘clear meanings’ are much bigger than the speech, discreet meanings, because the Aristotelian logic restricts the speech meanings. The connections among the ‘clear meanings’ are easy to build, which determines the correspondence between every discreet meaning/word and the entire field of ‘clear meanings.’ (Here we can see the analogy between this concept and the question and answer of the riddle.)
3. The ‘clear meanings’ and their connections, among themselves and with the conscious that they build, are in the opinion of some authors the way scientific discoveries are made.

*These processes are proceeding dynamically in the period of ‘stagnation’, after hard conscious work, preparation, questions, searching answers, in the moment of the insight, ‘catching the idea’ and its formulation after that, in which the arbiter is the conscious. The ‘endocept’ is this container, about a class of concepts of the unconscious, where from we take knowledge “that we ever had”, but in non-verbalised, pre-speech variant (Gornev 1981, 103–114).*

(Here the analogy with riddles is evident). This knowledge, as an attitude, is going to the conscious and/or becomes objective (visible) in the behavior as a need, because of the environment stimulation.



According to Arieti: 'other important characteristics of the 'endocept' are:

4. 'Endocept' identifies objects using their common attributes.
5. 'Endocept' makes the word lose its meaning, but makes the formal characteristic of the word more important.
6. Leads the conceptual (abstract) to its concrete representatives' (Gornev 1981: 104).

He also thinks that this way of thinking is characteristic of primitive communities and their folklore. According to him, it is a symptom of schizophrenia, too; the difference between folklore/psychotic/scientists is in the way they get the creative associations and their communication with the conscious; for the scientists the creative enlightenments, insights, connected with the 'clear meanings', are not the reality itself, but a principle, taken from one situation and put into another (because of some similarity in some principle); the conscious is included actively in this estimation for similarity or dissimilarity as an arbiter. It estimates the analogy, the meaning of a symbol, principle, and all of them are not equal to the situation (for example, if in folklore the moon is a symbol of the female principle and by amplification we may interpret it as such, but the interpretations does not say that the moon is a woman, as a person with schizophrenia would say)(Gornev 1981: 104). This principle could very successfully explain some of the characteristics of the 'sacred' riddles. The 'profane' riddles do not use the large semantic field of the 'clear meanings', but are connected to the discrete meaning of the word (which very often is a previously acquired concept). When we search for the answer of a riddle, it is an attempt at reminding a concept, connected to the explanation we have in the question of the riddle. In this case, the creative act, in which the intuition works by analogy of already created things, is far and away.

The archaic way of thinking gives larger horizons for conjunction, combining the meanings, in comparison with the cognitive way of thinking, where the identification of two objects is possible if only not one, but a number of characteristics (one class concepts) are there (Gornev 1981: 105).

The question of the 'sacred' riddle is a 'wide horizon'; there are not many characteristics, helping us to look for the analogy between the hinted object in the question and the answer. In the 'profane' riddle, the question is the condition, definition, having satisfactory numbers of characteristics, which excludes the working of intuition and includes work with the rational, cognitive process, which leads to the answer absolutely logically.

The 'incubation' of the idea, in the opinion of some authors, is a result of preceding work. Without denying this, Jung postulates the reason as an a priori working native archetype.

By giving and solving riddles, the dynamic cognitive process, which takes substance from the unconscious (from the 'endocepts'), can be trained. This game develops cognitive skills, which is another contribution of riddles. It is about the 'mental easiness', characteristic of creative people. According to J. P. Guilford, 'this is an ability for quick production of words and ideas, addressed to some requirements'. This also determines the creative characteristic skill – the introspection, to know about one's own needs and problems, to create the conscious from the unconscious, as much as possible. Riddles also have a therapeutic role, because the aim of every therapy is the same. And the creativity has the same role – as a process and as an effect or result. In the field of 'clear concepts', in which the question of the riddle stays, 'the emotion, the affect and thought are one' (Gornev 1981: 114). This fact explains the feelings during the game of riddles (and the creative process at large). The solution of every problem could be compared with a riddle-game, even the scientific discoveries. This is determined by a common archetype.

The open question is that about the enriching and the evolution of the unconscious. According to Arieti (Gornev 1981: 114), the endocepts have the ability to enlarge in time, as a result of the growing experience, the dynamics of the psychic processes, the connection between the conscious and the unconscious. The conscious integrates increasingly more substances, probably this dynamics refines by the experience in time, and leads to better collaboration and relationship among different aspects of the psychological apparatus, better structuring, adding new elements to the endoceptive fields (but the negative side here – if it is possible to estimate – is that this process becomes rigid and routine, using clichés). This is a conscious work, as it takes signals from the outer environment, passing through the perception, limned above or under, the conscious or the unconscious. This is the way they enrich the experience but not the archetype; they enrich the form but not the substance. Because the archetype is definite as the absolute principal-minimum, primordial, native, necessary, about to build everything else above it. The life experience enlarges the permutations, created on the archetypal (instinctive) basis. As a 'minimum', basic principle, the archetype probably does not have any evolution. We may put in it a great number of substances, but the archetype is the *vas*, the principle, the rule.

Another characteristic of riddles is the paradox in them. 'It is not a bird, but it flies...' This is the way a riddle becomes a mode for learning how to integrate opposite sides and how to leave aside the fixation in any schemes. When one listens to the question of a riddle, a number of different images come to mind, that 'are' and 'are not'; they shape the boundaries of what we are looking for according to the question. Finding the answer is the way in which the semantic fields of objects that we think about touch each other. This is also the way how what 'could not be' could lead to the correct answer – what 'it is'. The answer is as if creating a third thing, above the opposing things in the question. (In some riddles there are no opposite sides in the question, but different descriptions; the answer lies in synthesizing the most important aspect, the main idea in all of them.) The conscious are running from side to side, searching; this forms a break, a pause, turning to the inside, which predicts the insight. This pause, before the synthesis of the answer, gives the opportunity to build the Gestalt (the answer).

Cognitive psychology provides the most acceptable answers to how we think about the strategies (heuristics), the algorithms. But there is probably something more that other theories could bring their own contribution, another point of view, an opposite side of the fixation. This was an attempt to explain the already known things from a different point of view.

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