

THE FOUR FUNCTIONS

by Margi Ross

Jung discovered that people functioned in life in four different ways. These ways of processing life were through thinking (air), feeling (water), sensation (earth) and intuition (fire).

He classed thinking and feeling as rational functions, because they were concerned with ordering; sensation and intuition he classed as irrational. The functions also express in an introverted or extroverted way within each individual. In an introvert the energy does not need to flow out to the environment and to people; in the extrovert it does. Sometimes a person can become a 'turn type'. This means that in order to adapt to the environment they have turned themselves into what appears to be another type.

We use all four functions, but one predominates, and this he called the superior function. It is the one which is most differentiated, or sorted, and we can use it with subtlety and great skill. In addition to the superior function, there is an auxiliary one, which supports the superior, or two might be relatively equally developed and available to support the superior function. Lastly there's the inferior function. This is the least developed, or differentiated, but it also has a creative aspect, because it is not under our control and it is connected to the unconscious in a different way than the other functions. It is like having a room in your house where the doors, walls and ceilings are leaky, so things keep coming in, some good and creative and some bad.

If a person had feeling as the superior function, and intuition and sensation equally developed, a simple diagram of the functions would look like this:

FEELING
Superior Function

Supported by SENSATION and INTUITION

Then the Inferior Function would be
THINKING

Sometimes the map looks like this:

FEELING
Superior Function

SENSATION
Backs up the Superior Function

INTUITION is less developed

The Inferior Function
remains the same:

THINKING
Inferior Function

You could, of course, have intuition as the secondary function
and sensation as the less developed function.

In Jung's map, feeling and thinking are always opposites, as are
sensation and intuition. Jungian analysts describe someone
whose superior function is feeling as a 'feeling type.' In any
situation a person uses the superior function as the primary tool
to make sense of the situation. In my opinion, each function looks
after the viewpoint of an element and maintains the sanity and
order of that element in life. One might say that we are,
according to our superior function, the custodian of that element

and its reality but we also have to learn that other people live in and look after different realities.

There are men who are feeling types, just as there are women who are thinking types. But maybe earth and water have first to be differentiated by women, since they are feminine elements, in the way that men's differentiation of air and fire has opened the door for thinking and intuitive women to define their reality and live in it.

Thinking types order their lives through the logical association of related ideas or thoughts. Feeling types order their lives by referring to an inner ordered valuing of relationship in any situation. Feeling says to thinking, 'yes, but how will the people feel?' They are equal and opposite realities. The potential of the feeling type is to be able to speak up for the quality of the subjective experience of people and all life.

Intuition tells us of the potential in people and in other living things and situations. They know something without knowing how or why they know it and they can safely order their lives according to this knowing because their perception of it is accurate enough to be relied on.

Sensation tells us about the world of matter and energy. To the average sensation type, life is a concrete reality and they value, appreciate and care for concrete things: they can handle matter and the material world. For some sensation types, matter is energy and their skills lie with being at home in the world of subtle energy, whether it is seeing life as a living being and working to heal the earth, or being able to work with the subtle energy in the human body and heal it.

If I look in any of the main dictionaries, there is no definition of feeling which concurrent with the reality of it as a function.

In our culture feeling is confused with emotion and being concerned with how life and other living creatures feel is often labelled as sentimental. This means that a complete area of experience and reality is without language and validation and is not accepted as a reality. Most feeling types live a life at least partially adapted to the reality of thinking. It is like being able to speak a language but living in a foreign country, so the person is

always having to translate. The ability to speak this language has always been present in the feeling types I have worked with and it only needs someone who lives in the same reality for them not to be afraid to venture out.

In most countries, intelligence is equated with being able to think and reason. The reality of the thinking type is reinforced, so they have most confidence and often most power; but the other three realities exist and so the people in whom they live and seek a voice. In my experience in working with people over many years, I've come to the conclusion that the superior function is the vehicle through which the Self makes its connection with life and gives what it has to give to life. Earth and water, sensation and feeling, have not been seen as spiritual elements because spirit has been equated with transcendent and not immanent reality. So, feeling types and sensation types have been looked down on within New Age systems and I have often heard them called primitive and regressive. Countries, like people, have superior functions. In England, the superior function is thinking. This means that within our institutions, we do not order through values, we order through concepts.

If a society has one element predominating and that element is equated with truth, then injustice occurs, because the people who carry the other elements are not understood and their contribution to that society is not valued. They carry the shadow. I once had a dream in which I was told 'if the superior function does not take the chair at the head of the table, the inferior function takes it.' I was shocked and moved by the implications of this piece of information, for myself and for other people. It means that if people cannot live in their superior function, they feel ill and without power, and something important that they have to give to life is lost. At the same time the reality of the suppressed and unrepresented functions in all the people still exist, but have no voice. When a function has been undifferentiated in any country, it still speaks but in ways which are a danger to people and to society. This is one of the major reasons why wars occur.

In the more evolved person, the superior function is a vehicle for the perception of the soul, while it is part of the personality in the less evolved person. It is vital that we understand the needs and reality of all the functions and what each has to contribute.

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