

Pegasus and Tiny People; On Dream Amplification

I first encountered Robert Bosnak's dream methods at the C. G. Jung Institute in Boston and was later invited in to a private dream group that met in his home in the western suburbs of Boston. I must say that this group went deeper into the unconscious lives of the group members. We only got to know one another by sharing our dream lives but as the container felt safer, people shared more of the particulars of their background in their associations and I learned more about archetypal symbolism and how symbols can amplify a dream. Universal symbols can contribute to the understanding of a dream, not always by revealing meaning but by taking the dream up to the mythic level. Joseph Campbell said in an interview with Bill Moyers that "myths are a society's dream." They represent collective instincts and behavior, and throughout all the disciplines throughout all of known history, we see the same archetypes repeated, albeit in different forms. Archetypes are dynamic forces, clusters of images charged with emotional power and they shape-shift from individual to individual, yet they can be identified as The Divine Child, The Wise Old Man or Woman, The Devouring Feminine, The Hero, The Underworld, The Trickster, The Animus and/or Anima, etc.

When we can look at our lives mythically we get a more expansive view and are able to accept the more difficult passages as part of the continuum of changes in our lives. The Sea Journey or Dark Night of the Soul is equivalent to the Nigredo in alchemy, going down into the depths, and whether it is one of sorrow or loss, psychological trauma or emotional pain, this stage is a universal one for the hero or heroine of many a myth. When we can see our particular loss or trauma as a rite of passage rather than a termination, we then have the courage to confront the situation with the dragon or witch (or job loss or lawyer) by understanding and feeling which part of ourselves is resisting inevitable change.

In RB's private group we learned to apply more heat, more pressure to the vessel, and went further into the discomfort of difficult images, staying with them longer and watching psyche autonomously at work. One discovery for me was to see how the dream expanded under this pressure and in a two and half hour session we had time for side stories as well as time to juxtapose the poles of the dreams. All of the members were able to enter and stay in the twilight consciousness under the pressure of more intensive questioning.

Sometimes there would be long silences when everyone had fallen into the image as if it were a black hole. Sometimes active imagination would take over and new images would appear. Returning to certain earlier scenes after feeling an emotional release, we found they had changed and often enough, the monster was quelled. Most of the detours a dreamer took, even when instigated by resistances, turned out to be relevant to the images, resonating in a new manner. The exploration this group ventured upon each week began to feel like a sacred ceremony. I knew I was in the presence of collective energies. Even when we'd sat for long duration with a grotesque image, a mass murderer, a human sacrifice, a river of maggots, an explosive plane crash, a sexual molestation, a bloody war, or carnivorous plant—there was a deep sense of mystical participation in a creative ritual and the group bonded in this way.

Sometimes uncanny synchronistic phenomena would accompany the work and the group was eerily spooked. Once an airplane dream seemed to summon two or three low-flying jets overhead. Another time a dream of insects produced a large horsefly in the room. Or noises would occur at significant moments—the hum of the furnace suddenly kicking on, a neighborhood siren or barking dog, a sudden fit of coughing, a trio of sneezes would call attention to itself at precise moments when the work's pressure cooker contained a related image.

There was the contagion of laughter and tears too, of course, usually at the unimaginable pain that the human psyche is able to repress. Dreams exaggerate but the range of orphans, rag dolls, deformed babies, tree stumps, wormy and vile reptiles, severed limbs, earthquakes, floods and every body of water one can imagine was awesome and not infrequently disconcerting, especially to the dreamer. Then there were times when the group seemed to be dreaming in synch, animal dreams, diving dreams—eroticism. I recall once when we seemed to journey out to space and hung there like the flying fetus in the film 2001. In the luxury of time spent on a single dream, every nuance was followed. Often we left these meetings dazed, smiling abashedly at one another when we finally opened our eyes. The long drive back to Boston beginning sometimes as late as eleven PM allowed me a good thinking period in which to review the dream and the transferences and counter-transferences that had arisen in the work.

Occasionally we even shared what we dreamt about each other (RB himself being a frequent figure in our dream world) and we would work hard to reveal projections. We were never burdened with processing group dynamics and for a bunch of introverts, that was a treat. Dreams are dreams after all, and they were understood as such. Though there was bonding and a few of us became friends outside the group, there was also a cautious respect for distance and an absolute understanding that the work was confidential. I felt privileged to be a part of this dream cult.

I stayed with this group for four years and next to my son, it was the most important thing in my life. Through several significant dreams, I moved around the themes of my father and the men in my life. I also learned more about what I've come to call my Gemini Moon, the personality that is light, airy and programmed to please as an amiable social being. I believe I was able to recognize that part of myself apart from the brooding, darker Capricorn part but also to see how they were related. I won't review all the steps of this work but there was one dream I experienced there which demonstrates quite overtly the transformative aspects of the work. Here is the dream I reported to the group.

I'm on a beach, the beach I walk on almost daily near to where I live. It 's evening and I've just left a party where there were a lot of macho men annoying as well as rejecting me. I come down to the beach in a sullen mood when a huge German shepherd comes out from a rock and begins barking at me as if he was preparing to attack. I am terrified. I grab a stick and thrust it between his teeth, beginning to wrestle with him for the stick. I think if I engage him in play, he might see me as a friend. I throw the stick for him to fetch and as he chases it, I lean back against a rock. It seems I can relax, for I have befriended the wolf. As I lean back, the rock begins to move and I realize I am being pulled upward on the back of a horse, side-saddle. The horse is white and has wings; it spreads them and lifts me up with it as it ascends into the sky. I am awed and amazed as I awaken.

I shared this dream with the group and the group spent a long time getting me to feel the instincts of the dog. The value of "archetypal amplification" here is shown when we realize the dog is often a psychopomp who guides one through the underworld. One thinks of Anubis, the Egyptian god with the dog's head. I was still in the lower realms with my negative masculine complex, wrestling with my demons so-to-speak, and yet the sky into which the horse flies, and all the sky meant to me in my dream of the black truck comes in again as significant. I remember some of the group members actually laughing at the bizarre fairy-tale ending to this dream. Here I am riding a Pegasus off into the stars!

When we discussed the image of the Pegasus later and amplified its archetypal meaning, I was surprised to learn that Pegasus, the winged horse, was born from the blood that flowed at the beheading of the Medusa. If Medusa is the hag, the dark side of the feminine, the devouring bitch, she gives birth, nevertheless, to the beautiful Pegasus who is said to represent—of all things, *Poetry!* Later I came across the essay *Horses With Wings* by the poet, Denise Levertov.

Pegasus's father is Poseidon, the god of the sea— and as Levertov says: ". . . undifferentiated energy . . . a source of life but also of terror"

(125). Levertov also informs us that ". . . Medusa's legends most anciently seem to place her as a manifestation of the Earth Mother's terrible and devouring aspects . . ."

(126).. Furthermore "The word Gorgon is related to gargle, gurgle, and gargoyle: Medusa has been called 'a shriek personified' " (127). Levertov tells of some myths that say Pegasus was born of the neck of the Medusa, an intermediary place between mental and physical capacities. In fact

". . . it was not until the moment that Medusa's blood, spurting from her neck, *touched earth* (italics hers) that he became manifest" (129). And he inherits aspects from both his father and his mother. Levertov associates the Medusa's face with ". . . snakes and claws, wings and scales . . . gorgonic features" which "correspond to the quaking magma of emotion" (133). This emotion is often the catalyst for the poet's creation. She speaks of Pegasus as intuitive and that he can seen as a metaphor for the poem rather than the poet" (134).

I saw that my dream demonstrated how the material of the underworld could be transformed into something expressive and important for the poetic world. "To say that the poem, as well as the poet, is animal means that it has its own flesh and blood and is not a rarefied and insubstantial thing" (134). Pegasus himself then is poetry, born of a "fusion of opposites." The autonomous image emerges at the greatest point of tension. "Pegasus strikes his hoof on a stone and releases a fountain, ". . . Hippocrene, the fountain of poetic inspiration henceforth sacred to the Muses" (129). He flies upward, like the imagination reaching toward the sky.

This essay *amplified* my dream. The symbol of the Pegasus in its archetypal meaning was not something I had consciously thought about. Although I had studied mythology and come across Pegasus in several myths, I had not known his significance with this much particularity and certainly had not related to him as a symbol for this peculiar little hobby I had of writing poems.

In Alchemy the Philosopher's Stone, the Lapis Lazuli, or the gold is transformed from the work that is done on the lead, the Nigredo, the dark night of the soul. I was not yet riding the Pegasus in my life but I was mining the soul and facing the music, or dirge if-you-will, of my own darkness. That we can turn our demons into diamonds was not a new idea for me, yet I had not seen it happen in such concrete terms as these images presented.

My dream showed how the unconscious is not time-bound, and can even be ahead of us. It would be a few years before the material of the poems I was writing would pull together into a book, a "made thing" that gave expression to my sorrow as well as transformed it into something other, something outside of me with its own authority. Apparently, I was wrestling with the dog.

The dream group became my religion. It was where I felt most touched by spiritual energy and divine intervention; it was where I witnessed transformations and conjunctions resonating like a hall of mirrors, where I received true communion both with the material and with the other group members. It was the closest thing to energetic magic I had known. Over those years everything in my life deepened. I saw where my dreams came from, the flotsam and jetsam of my daily world and the hooks into my feeling world that grafted themselves to images I had little cognizance of taking in. I also observed through the active imaginative work that we make stories of our memories in ways that can never be tested as true. That memory itself was imaginative in its selection, and unique to each individual. I realized as I told a dream and the stories that ran beneath it, that this was my inner world and only my imagination could change it. Though I wouldn't have stated it this way, in light of what I know now, I saw that we do indeed *create our reality* and that that reality is relative. From this I learned how wrong we are in judging one another. I saw how dreamwork could open a person to the immense possibility of changing a personal world view. We could choose to end our victim hood by reexperiencing the feelings of the past that had hurt us and revision them in such a way as to make us capable of joy where sorrow had been.

One evening we tried to encourage a group member who hadn't been dreaming to search for even a fragment of a dream. We had found that those little ribbons of memory, one scene, one image, one word could be "cooked" to expand under the steam of the process. But no, he had not even a fragment on hand. However, he mentioned, there was a memory, something that had happened many years back, a scene that he had replayed on his inner screen so many times that it had become fixed, almost dreamlike. He wondered what would happen if he were to treat it as a dream. It was about an incident which left him feeling enormously guilty and had haunted him for years. We agreed to try and work it, and indeed, the memory yielded a deeply emotional state with repressed material as well. Through the work he was able to release some feelings that had been tied up in repression, holding the energy into a block. Of course he was not able to undo his misgivings but guilt is sometimes completely useless when there is no going back and one has learned the repercussions psychologically from a wrong move. We could see the dreamwork had cleared a space in his chest where breath had been held and energy stagnating. I remember thinking how flexible reality had become.

The question raises some difficult issues. Where was truth? Was truth absolute? When it comes to history it seems one must depend upon certain facts. But we all know history is written from many angles. Each person's story is important to the whole picture. Ask any family member about the day the house burnt down and you are liable to get as many versions of the story as there are family members. Yet to use imaginative techniques to strengthen the soul, heal old wounds, create room for self-forgiveness can only be a good thing. Even RB felt the process he had begun with his dream technique had not finished evolving. Rather than find the definitive poles in the dream, we began to work in a more circumambulatory way, seeing each scene of a dream as another view into a single issue.

I worked on six or eight of my own dreams with the group over the four years we met and there is one more that I'd like to mention here because in very explicit ways this dream proved years later to have some prescient resonance. Basically there were two dream figures who we could call shadows, one negative, one positive but both alien to my ego. Well, to be truthful I could relate to the first, and in my worst self-critical moments, I did identify with her, but she was so hideous, I was very resistant. She was a hag, old, mad and disheveled. She was sitting in a small bedroom on the edge of a bed. I described her as the archetypal madwoman. She was full of hurt and rage. We examined her for quite a while before we moved into the kitchen of the same house where there was an Asian man cooking. At first I thought of C., my lost man, the chef. But as I examined him closely he was someone entirely new. He appeared very centered, a guru-type. I knew the significance of the kitchen for Jung as a place where alchemical cooking was done, i.e. a place of possible transformation and this man was calmly keeping all the frying pans under control. I was in private therapy with RB at the time so I could see him as the wise man that RB represented but I could not really relate to owning this part of myself. The strange thing is—and I remember this image distinctly—the man had only one eye. But it was a *third eye*, by that I mean it was in the middle of his forehead. We discussed what it might be like to see through that eye. I experienced him as seeing into truth. Overall the dream's thesis spoke to a potential evolution from madwoman into spiritual wise man. This was some time in 1990. In 1994 I would remember that dream as something my unconscious delivered up to encourage me away from identification with the madwoman, to encourage me towards a new third-eye vision of what I, and all of us, the whole species, might become.

The dream group disbanded in the natural way that long-standing groups do, people moving for new jobs, new enterprises and undertakings which all seem to happen at once. Towards the end of the group, I had begun private therapy with RB and had continued to move into a desire to combine my writing with dream work. RB had encouraged everyone in the group to continue their own work in the field of dreamgroup work, whether they were therapists or not. One person who was in the field of drama had already run some dream-theatre work shops. Another who was adopted began doing work with the dreams of adoptees, citing areas of common emotions, symbols and image. RB himself was doing intensive work with the dreams of HIV positive men.

Many in the group had been changed by it and as we went our separate ways, applying the knowledge to our own spheres of experience. I was specifically taken with the visual image-making process that dreams undergo and called my work Dream Image Work. My beliefs in the resonances between dream-making and poems were underscored by the work on my Pegasus dream. I wanted to work with artists and writers and who used their dreams in their work.

I began a small dream group in my hometown which continued for a good while. The night before our first meeting I had a lovely, supportive dream. Naturally I was nervous about doing the work. Although we had discussed at times which questions to ask and when, and what worked best at which moments, I knew that being in the experience, I would have to follow my nose rather than *think* too much.

The dream I had the night before I led my first group located me in a parking lot with the key to my car in my hand. And yet I could not find my car. Of course, many of us have had this real life experience in huge parking lots whether in an underground mall or on the streets of a busy city and the state of anxiety and mild panic is a familiar one. I walked in and out among the cars parked everywhere and held the key up before my face as if it could unlock the deepest mysteries of science and philosophy. Finally I sat down, discouraged, and looking down at my key ring, I saw that it held two small hommunculi, an image of a little boy and also a young girl. They were about five years old, (the age of my intensive dream work) and as I smiled at them, delighted that these tiny, tiny people were alive, they waved me to come closer in. I cupped them in my hand and held them up to my ear, where they whispered ever so softly but with great enthusiasm, *We believe in you! We believe in you!*

References:

Levertov, Denise. "Horses With Wings." *What Is A Poet?* Ed. Hank Lazer. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1987. 124-134.