



## The Language of Metaphor in Dreams

By

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### **My Dream**

I am walking along a road when I see a woman. She is round with a striped dress and a strange hat. She is stuck in a large wire basket and cannot get out. Her legs are folded under her and are not visible. Everyone passes her by and ignores her cries for help. I observe two boys approach her. One wants to ignore her but the other one insists on stopping. The helpful boy reaches over and helps her out of the wire basket. Now her legs become visible as she stands up. While doing so, a white goose tumbles out from under her dress. The boys are amazed when they realize that this goose is the very one that lays the golden eggs. The eggs are not important because they are gold but important because each one holds the key to what I am not sure, maybe the beanstalk. The boys argue over who will get the duck and the woman of course, *lends* it to the boy who helped her. (End of dream. Sadly, I was not able to see what happened next.)

### **Analysis through Various Frameworks**

Following, is an attempt to analyze the dream from different points of view. I have chosen Freud, Jung, and Fredrick Perls. It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve too deeply but hopefully these simple thumbnail sketches will reflect their approaches somewhat.

**Freud's** approach would be to break the dream into analyzable images. His understanding was that dreams were the symbolic fulfillment of wishes, latent, unconscious desires or repressed desires. Because of his medical background and his work with the mentally disturbed, Freud was more concerned with the pathology of dreams. The above dream might be viewed as the repression of the female side and possibly some penis envy. He might be more interested in the dynamics between the boys and the woman and what sexual tensions might exist in these symbols. The fact that the woman is in this basket could be seen as sexual repression. The goose may be viewed as her desire for liberation. Freud may well be interested in how this dream relates to my childhood. The fairytales could be significant in that case. Free association work would guide the session.

**Jung** would first of all, "dismiss the psychoanalytic distinction a dream's manifest and latent contents." (Bulkeley, 1997) Next, he most certainly would notice the fairytale nature of the dream and use this to discover if the dream is subjective or objective. The fairtale nature of the dream could give clues to the universal symbology of the dream and the characters are prime for archetypal identification. The lady in the basket could be viewed as the archetype of the self or maybe the persona however, she seems to be more of a teacher, a guide to right choice.

**Perls** Has some similarities to Jung theory of viewing each part of the dream as a part of oneself. Perls would have me become each part of the dream to uncover insights that may be hidden.

Freud also would look at the associations to each part of the dream but Perls would focus on the feelings and so the sooner the dream analysis can begin the better while the dream is still fresh. In

his dialog with the client, he would ask the client to take on the role of each part in the hopes that the insights will allow integration of all of the parts.

Each of these three bring valid methodologies to the table that are still being tried and tested to determine what works and what does not. It is my opinion that each has a valuable gift and it is this gift that deserves the winnowing of the parts that are less relevant. Each of these brilliant men developed their own window from which they viewed and interpreted metaphor. Metaphorically, each window is a different color and to continue the metaphor further, imagine the sun is outside. Each sees the sun as the color of the glass in their particular window. Each may believe that their color is the only true one. Neuroscience and modern day study of dreams also have a window of color. It is only when we are able to achieve detachment to our ideas that we are able to step outside and agree to the color of the sun: Then the understanding becomes universal and the tools of each method become available to all. I believe that this can be achieved through a broader understanding of the language of metaphor. This would allow for the understanding of a universal substratum while appreciating and respecting the unique metaphoric constructions of the dreamer. In other words, unity and diversity in dream research would go a long way in helping us to discover the true meaning of dreams enhance our understanding of the importance of the language of metaphor.

### **Understanding the Nature of Metaphor**

#### **The Metaphorical Universe**

The physical universe we live in is metaphorical in nature. It provides an infinity of symbols we can use to understand a higher or spiritual reality: each grain of sand, each element of physical reality has a secret metaphor hidden within it. These are the building blocks we use to create our own personal reality in this world.

#### **Tribal Metaphors**

Way up north in the land of perpetual snow, there are tribes who have never seen a tree as none can grow there, however, they use the tree as a symbol of life as do many other tribes around the world. Chief Arvol Looking Horse describes the Black Hills as the heart of the world and interestingly enough, when seen from space, it appears to be beating.

Our ancestors have been trying to protect our Sacred Site called the Sacred Black Hills in South Dakota. “Heart of Everything That Is, from continued violations. Our ancestors never saw a satellite view of this site, but now that those pictures are available, we see that it is in the shape of a heart and, when fast-forwarded, it looks like a heart pumping. (Horse)

The Lakota specifically and Native Americans in general, describe a different set of metaphors especially when describing dreams and life after death. They talk about the grandfathers and grandmothers who are closer than our own life vein. They are in our world, not some far off heaven and they are there to guide us, protect us and educate us if we but ask. All of the ceremonies are methods for creating connection between this world and that life we live in in our dreams, this life and the life of those passed on, the state of human with that of God or Creator which is the term used by most tribes. All of it is about connection between both realities and their metaphors are tied into every single ceremony they do. The pipe for instance, is the uniting of mother earth with the masculine Creator, the male with the female, the soul with its source. It is this divine unity that permeates every aspect of life providing a richness of metaphor surpassing the ordinary. It is only in our culture, it seems, that we have divided science and spirituality hence the huge discrepancy of understanding between both camps.

Traditional Aborigine societies understand that the Dreamtime is sacred. It is not a separate reality from where we go when we dream or when we die. In other words, it is the same reality. The Dreamtime is eternal and therefore beyond space and time. According to the Aborigines and many other tribes, it is the source we came from and the source we return to.

Small children learn how to draw pictures with a house, sun; tree or flower and all are obviously symbolic as children use the similar symbols all over the world. We live in a metaphorical world with metaphorical brains but why? Why did all the religious teachers such as

Christ, Buddha etc., use metaphor as a vehicle for their teachings; because metaphors are creative and demand participation from the listener. The first part is compared to the second part and both of those parts are fixed but the final outcome is left to the imagination of the receiver. For instance, if I say something such as “my heart is bright like the sun today”, heart and sun are the fixed but how you interpret that sentence is left up to you. If it is a good metaphor you will understand that I am happy or joyful but you are free to interpret it in ways I may have never thought of. It is a creative process. That is why no one can claim to know the symbolic meaning of a metaphor that belongs to someone else but there are distinct, general patterns that are universal.

In this world, I posit that there are four main categories of metaphor: literary, life events, (the drama of life), the material universe and mythological as in myth, fairy tales etc. Imagine for a moment that all four are represented by a very large card deck. Each card has a symbol or picture representing the actual metaphor similar to Tarot or any other colorful deck. Imagine that each time we understand or master one we get a card and it is this deck we deal with and take with us into dreams and into life after death. It is from these that new creations are built. From the moment of consciousness, birth or possibly earlier, the development of a metaphorical repertoire begins. Each object, each life scenario or drama is one more metaphor inviting us to solve or resolve. Each time we do, a spiritual attribute is born or strengthened. It is the very ingredient and process necessary to evolve from animal to human. Infants can be likened to animals in that they are still chaotic, undisciplined and self-centered. This is the first birth. The development of metaphorical language and symbol in waking and dreaming life is the very nurturance necessary for the transition from the animal state into the human being, the second birth; a human being ready to become a contributing member of society.

Spiritual capacities and maturity are necessary to become a contributing member of society because society itself is a spiritual construct. Civilization is composed of elements born in the mind: the arts, sciences, philosophy, religion and even architecture are all creations in the mind

first; the imagination, the invisible, the non-physical, is all from the spiritual part of the human being. The material of the physical realm is used to construct the vision but they were all created from the mind and become expressive metaphors of their own. Each circumstance that we encounter holds within it a metaphor that is the key to the particular attribute necessary to pass its test. For instance, a hateful circumstance calls for love, or the key in a painful situation could be patience or forgiveness. Each circumstance has its own particular key to its own puzzle. This life-long journey of meeting, conquering and understanding the metaphoric conditions of our lives is the training and development of the tools necessary for understanding and eventual entrance into a higher reality. Preparation for death could be a celebratory event if our attitudes were different and we truly understood the world we live in. The more adept we become at interpreting and responding well to a metaphoric set of circumstances, the more confident and mature we become.

### **Dreams and the Near Death Experience**

Dreams are the perfect metaphor for the near death experience. Regardless of the content of dreams, the process itself is fascinating to consider. In dreams we see, hear, feel, move, etc. All of our capacities are intact and yet we are motionless with none of our physical senses or capacities in use. Nothing is operational and yet we see, hear, talk, dance, and rather than being limited we are freed instead to use our imaginations without restriction. Both use all of the senses to experience and understand what is happening while the body is either unconscious, pronounced dead or like in the case of dreaming, asleep.

Dreams are drenched in metaphor. It is so metaphoric a process that mountains of books have been written with supposed interpretation of this language, and language it is however, interpretation is a tricky business! Accounts of near death experiences are similar in that they also use metaphor to describe a reality that is beyond words. The tunnel, the light, the journey, and on

and on are metaphoric symbols. It is as though this higher reality can only be somewhat expressed by the metaphors we develop here in order to decipher there.

### **Final Thoughts**

My dream described above, is a very metaphoric dream. To me, it implies choice as the two boys reflect. More importantly, is the basket and the role of the woman. In order for her to have something of great value to offer she needed to ask for help and this freed her from the basket. I see this in my own life as it is very difficult for me to ask for help but necessary if I am going to be able to really fulfill my purpose here. The wire basket represents the difficulties I have with my health. I am actively seeking the right medical help during this period and at the same time, I am anxious to offer my gifts to the world more fully. I understand this dream and the goose will lay a golden egg for that kind boy but it is only a loan as she will come back to me when it is time.

### References

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