

CHAPTER 2

THE HALF-DREAM STATE

The territory we shall be covering, that of the waking dream, is by no means virgin, although the extent of modern neglect of it would have us think so. The waking dream, the conscious experiencing of images, has been discovered and lost, re-found and shared, countless times. Although its significance has varied in different cultures and subcultures, there have accrued through repetition some notions or fantasies concerning waking dreams and involvement in them.

The attempt to dream while awake, itself paradoxical, involves one in a number of paradoxical states, actions, and attitudes: the half-dream state, action through non-action, controlled abandon, un-controlling control, disciplined dreaming. The paradoxes point to an effort and a discipline which reverse the natural flow of events. The medieval alchemists described this as a work against nature, an *opus contra naturam*. This opus creates a directionality away from the perceptual and the material, to the imaginal and the psychological.

BETWEEN SLEEPING AND WAKING

The intermediary nature of metaphor is mirrored by the state of consciousness most often used to strengthen man's connection to the imaginal. The metaphor uses matter in order to convey the immaterial. In doing so it creates a third realm which lies between the other two. The state of consciousness being described uses the ego to record and to observe the non-ego. The body is relaxed until it nears sleep, and yet awareness is sustained. As the world of images appears, as if from dreams, they are recorded and remembered, and at times interacted with. This state

of consciousness has been described as an intermediary state, that of the half-dream. It creates an intersection between two worlds — as the symbol itself does.

This conjunction has in many instances been regarded as sacred. The land of what we call dreams and the unconscious was understood in other times to be the world of the gods, spirits, or ancestors. In ancient Greece, for instance, it was believed that the gods came through the keyhole of the dreamer's room and stood beside their bed. The soul could leave the dreamer's physical body and travel with the gods during sleep. Similarly, the Chinese believed the source of dreams to be the dreamer's spiritual soul or *hun*. The *hun* traveled about during sleep to talk with dead spirits and souls (de Castle, 1971:4). Whether dreams came from gods, demons, or the soul, there is common to these ideas the notion that the dream and the dreamlike are connected with a force beyond the mind and body of the dreamer. The dreamlike has a quality of "otherness," of dissimilitude to the material world.

Through the waking dream a journey was made possible. Either the gods or spirits were enabled to pass into our world, or we into theirs. The conjunction was envisioned not only as a bridge from one world to another, but as a plane of co-existence of the two worlds. Through the connection of the two, the individual was able to obtain gifts of wisdom and self-knowledge from the divine benefactors. One could learn of the spirit world. The connection of the two planes — spiritual and material — through participation in the half-dream state was considered to bring health.

There have been numerous distinctions made between divine and natural dreams — those inspired by the spirits and those not, those meaningful and those nonsensical. Jamblichus of Chaldeis (1821) noted that the mystical lights and voices of religious visions occurred most often in the half-dream state. Dreams sent by God, he claimed,

take place either when sleep is leaving us, or [when] we are beginning to awake, and when we hear a certain voice which concisely tells us what is to be done; or voices are heard by us, between sleeping and waking, or when we are perfectly awake. And sometimes, indeed, an invisible and incorporeal spirit surrounds the recumbents, so as not to be perceived by the sight, but by a certain other co-sensation and intelligence.

... a still more perfect manner when the sight perceives, when intellect, being corroborated, follows what is performed, and this is accompanied by the motion of the spectators.

Such, therefore, and so many being the differences of the dreams, no one of them is similar to human dreams. But wakefulness, a detention of the eyes, a similar oppression of the head, a condition of the head, a condition between sleeping and waking, an instantaneous excitation, or perfect vigilance, are all of them divine indications, and are adapted to the reception of the gods, and a part of divine appearances antecedes according to things of this kind.

The Chinese, among others, also believed that their mystical dreams occurred in an unnatural daytime sleep that could not be properly regarded as sleep at all (de Becker, 1968:154).

The Romantics, as the Greeks and Muslims before them, glorified this state as if it were the most direct way to contact the muses and the creative intelligence.

To dream and altogether not to dream.

This synthesis is the operation of the genius, by which both activities are mutually reinforced.

Novalis (quoted by Béguin, 1939: 210)

The half-dream state appeared either to give one access to a realm other than that of the nightly dream, or to give one new means of approaching the imaginal phenomena of dreams that in itself changed their nature. To approach this new realm or manner of relating, one could try to become aware while dreaming or try to evoke dreaming while being aware. The former often gave rise to various meditative practices, while the latter approach was frequently incorporated in symbolic rituals of vision questing.

WAKING SLEEP, DAYDREAMS, AND HALLUCINATIONS

We seem, as Gurdjieff claimed, to spend most of our lives in a form of “waking sleep.” During the day we are usually neither asleep or aware. Our usual state of consciousness is opposite of that required for waking dreams.

As our thoughts, feelings, and actions come to the edge of our conscious field, our awareness goes to meet them and merges with them. As our awareness becomes absorbed and attached to the emotion, thought, or action, we become it. There is no part of our awareness to remain outside and observe what is going on. Instead of noting that a feeling, for instance of depression, is passing through us, we “*become* depressed.” “*I am* depressed.” That identity, created by the fusion of awareness with the emotion, causes us to lose recognition of the experience. It is only our awareness in its unattached state, that allows a part of us to remain separate, to be able to observe.

How often do we find ourselves in a daydream? What has happened to our attention in relation to the subject we are dreaming over? Do we have any idea where the daydream began and how it progressed through the linking of images? Or has our attention thoroughly merged with the subject? In most cases we are never aware of the daydreams and moods that pass in and out of us. As long as our attention is absorbed by one kind of reality, be it daydreams, mathematical computations, insecurities, or the study of the imaginal, we are not free to become aware of what is

happening in our relation to these. Our gaze is fixed, glued on the center and all that moves on the periphery is missed. To begin to see, it is as if a part of us must step back and not fix itself so intently on the middle. The total absorption into the subject is lessened in an attempt to get our awareness from the mixture with which we can then discriminate what is moving. *This does not mean one steps out of the experience, becomes unrelated, and begins to analyze.* It means that our sensitivities and awareness are freed to participate independently as themselves and to bring their unique qualities into the situation. For example, if you are running you may be totally absorbed in it in a way that makes it impossible for you to hear your rhythm, your breathing, to feel your stomach and lungs, your feelings of abandonment, of triumph, of being overcome, your self-criticisms and congratulations and the images in which they come. Do you feel pursued or as if you are going towards something — or does all that, at those moments, seem superfluous to the joy of running? Has time disappeared, leaving you in the task of transversing pure space?

We are often obliged to get something accomplished and we use our awareness to get us through the motions correctly. The task is finished, but what we are left with is often just the knowledge that it is done — the groceries are bought, the baby changed, the stocks negotiated, and the paper typed. We may know we have a feeling of accomplishment, but what about all the rest that was happening in us around what we were doing?

We see the table but we seldom see ourselves seeing, experiencing, the table. We do not consciously note the geometrical elements that we recognize unconsciously in order to call it “table.” Instead of seeing the sheen in the wood, the shape of the legs, the reflections from the window in the surface, we usually just see a “table” — a pattern that resides more in our minds from the past, than from the actual experience in the moment. We are unaware of how we experience our unique pasts (both historical and imaginal) in relation to the table. What is a table to us? Is it the scene of long happy meals or family arguments? Did we play on it, paint or work on its surface? Was it

always too big or too small; lovely or with snagging nails that caught our shirt sleeves each time we tried to rise? Was it vacant except for our fantasies of what we wished to have happen on it, or had we always been in the situation of never even seeing its top, as it was buried long before in the debris of our daily pursuits.

We confuse aware participation in the imaginal with daydreaming, and we use the qualities of the latter to condemn the former. In daydreaming, the ego's attention becomes attached to the imaginal contents in the same way it does to our daily concerns. There is no awareness during it or memory afterward of what was going on. One could say that daydreams are a form of sleeping wakefulness, as opposed to the state of wakefulness even while sleeping that characterizes a waking dream.

The distinction between the two is fundamental and crucial and has given rise to many warnings. The medieval alchemists, for instance, warned against just such confusion between daydreams and creative imagination. "*Opus nostrum, per veram imaginationem et nun phantastica.*" "Our work ought to be done by true imagination [active, purposeful, creative] and not a fantastical one [nonsense, phantasm, fleeting impression]" (quoted by Jung, 1968:192). Paracelsus also cautioned against any confusion of *Imaginatio vera* (true imagination) and fantasy, the "madman's cornerstone." "Die Fantasey ist nicht *Imaginatio*, sondern ein Eckstein der Narren . . ." In the Sufi idea of creative imagination it was believed that whenever the imagination is allowed to "stray" and to be "wasted recklessly, when it ceases to fulfill its function of perceiving and producing the symbols that lead to inner intelligence," the intermediary world (that of the *mundus imaginalis* and of the soul) can be considered to have disappeared (Corbin, 1972:14).

The confusion between daydreams and waking dreams has served to discredit the latter. One condemns the imagination for its tendency to flee from difficulties, to involve one in wish-fulfilling fantasies, to fill up the voids "through which grace might pass" (Weil, 1939:145). These are qualities, however, that do not arise from the imagination, but rather from our way of relating to it. In these instances one uses the imagination not in a disciplined

search for the values of the imaginal, but as a relaxation from awareness. The degradation that daydreams bring to the imagination should be transferred to the “ego” and its manner of relating to images.

Similarly the phenomenon of hallucinations has been used to discredit the imaginal. Waking dreams and hallucinations, however, rely on two distinctly different psychic functions: imagination and perception. Hallucinations purport to deal with external material and perceptual reality, whereas waking dreams and dreams pertain to imaginative reality (Berry, 1974:96). Whereas visions are “non- corrigible experiences which do not admit of verification or falsification by reference to the perceived world” (Casey, 1974:13), hallucinations do.

In an hallucination the individual is unable to recognize image as image and external perception as perception. The two are superimposed in a way that does not permit an imaginal awareness to exist. In regard to awareness of the imaginal the hallucinator is asleep.

DISCIPLINED DREAMING

The training of the ego to surrender its usual activities and ways of using consciousness in order to maintain vigilance while dreaming has been regarded as a discipline and an art. In general, the ability to be aware must be freed from its usual tendency to attach itself to the object of awareness, thereby losing its ability to reflect on that object. Awareness cannot immediately dis-identify from its usual attachments. In some kinds of meditation a form (mantra, mudra, koan) is substituted for the usual objects of awareness. Gradually the awareness dis-identifies from daily preoccupations and daydreams and coalesces around the meditative form. Whether the object or form used has significance in and of itself varies in different systems of meditation. Similarly what one does with the awareness once it has become a separate entity depends upon the particular methods and goals of a

system.¹ At this point, “reality” changes and one is faced with new phenomena.

In the Western tradition of contemplation, although the awareness of the ego is stressed, the ego is allowed to converse with the arising contents of consciousness and indeed to value this relation. The object is not transcendence of all content (imaginal or otherwise), as is true in many Eastern systems, but rather the attaining of a new conscious relation to content.

In the Middle Ages it was a common practice to hold conversations with the soul... to ask it questions and to hear answers arising from a source other than consciousness. One was aware of things outside the ego and could connect with them, but in a way that could be consciously remembered and experienced. Hugh de St. Victor began such a conversation in the following way:

I will speak in secret to my soul, and in friendly conversation I will ask her what I should like to know. No stranger shall be present, we will talk alone and openly to each other. Thus I need not be afraid to ask even the most secret things and she will not be ashamed to reply honestly.

Tell me, I ask you, O my Soul, what is it that you

¹ The present interest in the West concerning Eastern systems of meditation gives the Westerner another argument to add to his rationalistic disavowals of the imaginal. The fact that many Eastern systems discourage the devotee from regarding images seriously cannot be taken at face value as an indictment against the imaginal. We want to think that the “East” has realized as fully as we the ridiculousness of fantasy. To do that we ignore the fact that they have already attained a relation to the imaginal that far surpasses ours. Their texts — full of images and fantasies — lay as testament to this. “It must stir a sympathetic chord in an enlightened European when it is said in the *Hui Ming Ching* that ‘shapes formed from the fire of the spirit are only empty colours and forms.’ That sounds quite European and seems to meet our reason excellently. We, indeed, think we can flatter ourselves at having already reached such heights of clarity because such phantoms of gods seem to have been left far behind. But the things we have outgrown are only word-ghosts, not the psychic fact that was responsible for the birth of the gods” (Jung, 1968b:112).

love above everything?

The *vita contemplativa* of the medieval Christian church used meditations to engage in what was termed “disciplined dreaming,” the voluntary seeing of visions (Eliot, “Dante”).

A central notion to the type of consciousness needed for disciplined dreaming is embodied in the concept of action through non-action, as taught by Meister Eckhardt and Chinese Taoism (Jung, 1968b:93). In actualizing this principle our awareness is freed from its absorptions and can begin to perceive the imaginal. “Non-action prevents a man from becoming entangled in form and image (materiality). Action in non-action prevents a man from sinking into numbing emptiness and dead nothingness” (*Secret of the Golden Flower*, 1962:53).² The awareness refrains from identification without going to sleep. It is kept in circulation, freed from absorption into various things. It tries to remain independent.

Therefore you have only to make the light circulate: that is the deepest and most wonderful secret. The light is easy to move, but difficult to fix, if it is made to circulate long enough, then it crystallizes itself . . .

Ibid., 22

Through non-action we cease doing things to the world and ourselves in order to be able to perceive in certain ways. This allows more of an opportunity for us to be moved, rather than for us to move.

As long as the heart has not attained absolute tranquility, it cannot move itself. One moves the movement and forgets the movement; this is not movement in itself. Therefore it is said: If, when stimulated by external things, one moves, it is the impulse of the being. If, when not stimulated by

² A Chinese alchemical text concerning meditation.

external things, one moves, it is the movement of heaven. The being that is placed over against heaven can fall and come under the domination of the impulses. The impulses are based upon the fact that there are external things. They are thoughts which go on beyond one's own position. The movement leads to movement. But when no idea arises, the right ideas come. That is the true idea. When things are quiet and one is quite firm, and the release of heaven suddenly moves, is this not a movement without purpose? Action through non-action has just this meaning.

Ibid., 58

Trying to watch our psycho-mental flux without interfering in it or becoming attached to its contents (and thereby losing awareness) and yet to still be receptive to it, is one of the hardest possible things — perhaps because of the paradox of activity embodied in the principle of action through non-action. We must sacrifice what seems to us to be a sense of control on our part, but which is really not as it is the psychomental flux controlling us. In a sense we gain actual control through the crystallization of our awareness, and yet it is not control in the sense of authority to be exercised over anything. If we try to use it in that way, in that moment the ego reverts to its initial state, becoming absorbed in the effort of control.

When we are actually on the edge of waking and yet are fully within the landscape and action of our dream, there is sometimes a moment when we realize that we are both awake and within the images of our soul. Similarly, as we are travelling on trains or in cars, or doing some activity in which we can drift into the imaginal, there is sometimes a moment when we become aware of where we are imaginally without causing the images to immediately disappear. At these moments the imaginal and the waking worlds are known to not only co-exist, but to co-exist potentially in awareness as well.

In tenth century Tantric Buddhism, the yogi was taught to retain his consciousness during sleep. He would hold himself between the two states of sleep and wakefulness by placing himself “between the exhaled and inhaled breaths,” associated with a certain quality of energy (de Becker, 1968:153-4). It was believed that the “Lord of necessity grants [the meditator] during dreams the ends he pursues, provided that he is profoundly contemplative and places himself at the junction between waking and sleeping” (*Spandakârikâ* of Vasagupta). In Tibetan Buddhism different meditations were similarly used to allow the meditator to remain conscious while asleep in order to observe the world of visions (Evans-Wentz, 1967).

Often in attempting the achievement of consciousness while dreaming the dreamer will try to remember to do a certain activity in the dream. This may be a form of meditation or it may be simply an action like holding one’s dream hands in front of one (Castaneda, 1973). Progressively the individual is able to inhabit the dream ego’s body, and in some instances any of the other images in the dream. This brings consciousness into the dream in such a way that one is simultaneously dreaming and aware of dreaming. Whether or not or in what way this changes the nature of the dream is debatable. It seems more than probable, however, that “observed sleep is already transformed sleep and that every intervention the sleeper makes in it modifies its nature” (de Becker, 1968:156). There are different accounts of what is possible in this state of observed dreaming. The Tantric and Tibetan masters reported that they could control the dream by their conscious presence. Others despite their insistence on gaining control over dreams (however without the discipline of the yogi) have admitted their failure (*ibid.*, 156).

In the nineteenth century there was a revival of attempts to incubate dreams. These took the form, however, of trying to exert the will over the dreamworld. This was a fundamentally different approach from incubation rituals where the will is aligned with and respectful of the dream world. In these later attempts one would try to not only induce dreams on certain subjects but to

induce the specific contents of the dream. Once the dream began the dreamer would try to alter the flow of images. Jean-Paul (Richter) came to the conclusion that it “was impossible to forcibly obtain or prevent the appearance of certain images and that it was impossible to know whether even induced images [would be] friendly or terrifying” (*ibid.*, 158). The most detailed of these nineteenth century reports is that of Hervey de Saint-Denis, *Les Rêves et les moyens de les diriger* (1867). For twenty years he kept a dream diary recording his attempts to make the will intervene in sleep.

One night, while sleeping, when I felt complete knowledge of my real state and I was rather apathetically watching the passage of the whole phantasmagoria of my sleep which, incidentally, was very clear, it occurred to me to take advantage of it, to make some experiments with the power I might or might not have of evoking certain images by the use of my will alone. While seeking a subject to concentrate my thoughts upon, I recalled the monstrous apparitions which (in a previous dream) had impressed me so deeply, owing to the terror they inspired. I tried to evoke them by seeking them assiduously in my memory and wishing, as intensely as possible, to see them again. The first attempt met with no success. At this moment the pastoral scene of a countryside unfolded before me, in the midst of which I saw harvesters, and wagoners laden with com. No suspicion of a spectre answered my summons, and the association of ideas-cum-images that formed my dream seemed to have absolutely no desire to leave the even path they had naturally taken. Then, still dreaming, I reflected as follows: a dream being a sort of reflection of real life, the events which seem to take place in them generally follow, in their very incoherence, certain laws of succession conforming to the ordinary sequence of all real events. I mean, for example, that if I dream of having a broken arm, I shall

believe that I have it in a sling or that I am using it with care; that if I dream the shutters of a room have been closed, I will have, as an immediate consequence, the idea that the light is intercepted and that there is darkness around me. Starting from this idea, I imagined that if, in a dream, I performed the action of putting my hand in front of my eyes, I should obtain a first illusion in relation to what would actually happen if I did the same thing while awake; that is to say that I would make the images of objects which seemed to be situated in front of me disappear.

Then I asked myself whether, once this interruption of pre-existing visions had taken place, my imagination would not find it easier to evoke the new objects on which I was trying to fix my thoughts. The experiment followed this reasoning closely. In my dream I saw a hand in front of my eyes, and this did indeed have as its first effect the destruction of the vision of the countryside at harvest time, that I had vainly tried to change by the force of the imagination alone. For a moment I remained without seeing anything, as would have happened in real life. Then I made another energetic call to the memory of the famous eruption of monsters and, as if by enchantment, this memory, now clearly placed in the objective of my thoughts, suddenly stood out sharp, brilliant and tumultuous, without my even noticing, before waking, the way in which the transition had taken place.

de Saint-Denis, 1867:283-6

But although de Saint-Denis achieved these types of success, he had to admit “I have never managed to follow and master all the phases of a dream” (ibid., 291).

The attempts of de Saint-Denis and Jean-Paul were essentially different in method and intention from most earlier attempts to induce dreams or to control dreaming. In the Tibetan

practices the yogi was not ultimately trying to subjugate the visionary to the will of the conscious personality. He was seeking to learn of the visionary in order to recognize its nature as maya or illusion, just as he had sought previously to be aware of the phenomenal world as maya. He was not interested in aggrandizing the territory under the control of the ego. . . but rather in passing beyond the ego altogether. Hippocrates had tried, as is outlined in *A Discourse on Dreams*, to introduce certain images into his patients' dreams, often while they were in the half-dream state. These were believed to be healthful images that would aid in remedying the patient's particular difficulty. The images had themselves come from the imaginal landscapes so well known to the Greeks. The attempt to induce a particular dream was aimed not at increasing the patient's power over images or at showing that this was possible, but at aligning him with certain imaginal principles in the hope that this relationship would heal the individual.

What appealed to de Saint-Denis (and later to many others, as we shall find) about the possibility of incubating dreams was quite different from the ritual uses of dream and vision incubation in Greece, Egypt, India, China, Japan, and Islam. The Age of Enlightenment had made men think that rationality and the conscious ego could be made to conquer all else and that this would prove beneficial. To make the content of the dream and the vision — that which seems most up to alien forces — yield to the will must have seemed like a most attractive endeavor. Through an example of vision incubation in ancient Greece and one of vision questing among the American Indian tribe of the Oglala Sioux, it is hoped that the practices surrounding these will alert us to a totally different possibility than the one de Saint-Denis and the early psychologists so eagerly sought for. In the following examples it is clear that the ego is used only as a humble instrument to seek for visions and to help the daily life become more attuned with (rather than triumphant over) the reality of the visionary.

VISION INCUBATION

In times past, the elements of incubation rituals were designed to transform one's usual state of consciousness into one in which the incubant was able to receive a vision or dream from the gods. One can understand an incubation ritual as "an externalization of a psychological fact — a projection mirroring a natural inner process." It is "as if the incubant were able by aligning him or herself with the symbolic structure of the ritual, to allow a certain inner condition to arise which cannot be produced directly" (Reed, 1974). The outer symbolic actions of the ritual were able to create a state of awareness and certain inner attitudes that allowed the incubant to gradually separate himself from the usual frame of consciousness in order to be able to participate in the visionary realm with the god. By looking at it in this way one can attempt to understand the symbolic significance of some of the elements of a ritual and to ask oneself the question of how they can be incorporated in one's own attempts to incubate waking dreams.

At the Trophonios Incubatorium in Lebadela, as described by C. A. Meier (1954:649), there was an elaborate system of preparation that almost insured that those actually participating in the incubation period were committed, and in the right spirit to encounter the gods. First, the person was supposed to have a message from the god Asklepios (the god of healing) in the form of a dream advising him about the wisdom of making the trip to the sanctuary.

According to the Isis mysteries the incubant was invited by the god through a dream or vision to come and sleep in the temple. If he tried to sleep in the temple's *Adyton* ("the place not to be entered by the unbidden") without being invited, he would die. The mysteries warned further that one should not "hesitate when called, nor hasten when not commanded" (quoted in Meier, 1954:70-1). These warnings reminded him that the ego could not be the one to invite him to participate with the gods. He must

passively and humbly await their invitation and permission. Similarly, when one has been called, to not accept is a defiance of the ego against the will of the gods, for which the person was punished. The action is not enough in itself. It must be performed in the right time, by the right man, in the right way. These are things that cannot be sanctioned by opinions and desires, but must be derived from inner attitudes. In the Chinese *Book of the Elixir* it is said that “When the right man (white magician) makes use of the wrong means, the wrong means work in the right way,” and conversely, “if the wrong man uses the right means, the right means work in the wrong way” (quoted in *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, 1962:63).

The applicant for healing arrived in Lebadela with the conviction, the trust, that he was meant to enter the ritual, and that although he as yet did not know the content of the vision, the process would be healthful for him. The period of preparation before incubation nurtured a receptive attitude in the applicant. The incubant drew his attention away from the usual attachments to the daily world through ritual cleansings, fasting,³ and sexual abstinence. He symbolically prepared himself for the humble acknowledgment of higher forces through the act of sacrifice. Through the ritual sacrifice he expressed his smallness in relation to the gods and his high valuation of the relation to the gods that he was seeking, i.e. that he was willing to give up something of importance for it, in honor of and thanks to the god.

When the priest believed the incubant was ready, two thirteen year old youths were sent by night to fetch him. He was taken to a river, annointed and washed. The priest gave him the power to “forget all that had gone before and power to remember all he would see.” The ego was thus disconnected from identification with the concerns of the past and was used as an agent of receptivity toward the movement of the gods in the present. The incubant was then further humbled by being shown

³ Wine, meat, specific fish, and broad beans were thought unfavorable to the appearance of the healing vision (de Becker, 1968:165).

an “unapproachable statue of Trophonious,” which no doubt reminded him of the immensity of the force he was coming into relationship with. Clad and bound in a white sheet, he descended by a ladder into a cave. The patient crawled feet first into a hole as wide as his body. When his knees were in the hole a whirlpool underneath his feet pulled him downward. At this point the incubant was a prisoner of the god and at his mercy. Honey cakes were always taken with the patient in order to appease the snakes which inhabited the cave. The patient was at the mercy of the god, and it was within this situation that he received the healing vision.⁴ The incubant remained in the hole usually for several days (without food, of course) before he received a vision. “At the god’s will,” he was ejected from the hole.

At all of the Asklepan sanctuaries the incubants were required to pay fees, as well as to transcribe or dictate their dreams and visions from the incubation. The experience itself was observed to produce effects on the patient. It was not until several hundred years after the initiation of the ritual, when the people were drifting away from the basis of their religion, that the temple priests began to perform interpretative tasks.

In Greece the site of the incubation was sacred and meaningful.⁵ The setting and ritual elements of the incubation

⁴ Similarly, we may often be more able to receive visions when we are in a state of illness or depression. In both, one’s energy is drawn away from the objects it usually participates with. One’s being is drawn inward and downward. What at first seems to be deathly darkness, is found to be inhabited. If the creatures are given respect and attention, “honey cakes,” they may kindly approach closer so that we may see them.

⁵ We can also give fantasy to whether there are imaginal sites where we would be more likely to be able to incubate a dream or vision. This might come from a dream, a fantasy, or an actual experience. By dwelling there imaginally we can establish a connection to it. Different imaginal sites and benefactors (the ones who give the vision) set up different constellations of images or archetypes. Children know quite naturally how to find such secret magical places in which to house their treasured fantasies. They intuitively know never to let anyone into that secret space; not even to tell anyone, unless that person himself is very special.

enabled the incubant to change his allegiance and attention from the ego world to that of the gods. He had to learn their ways of communication. He must never in a flash of hubris lose his sense of humility.

We want the god to help us to see more clearly what is going on in us. In this sense we are *aitematikoi*, disposed to ask, and so are our dreams. But [Artemidorus] added, we should never ask the gods undue questions! And if the answer has been granted, we must not forget to sacrifice and give thanks.

Meier, 1966: SI 3

KEEPING CLOSE TO THE VISION

Among the American Indians means were created to maintain connection with the images from visions. Visions were prepared for, actively sought, brought back to the other members of the tribe and integrated into the daily life and knowledge of the tribe. The visions, sent by the spirits, helped both young and old to find their relationship to the world – what their role in their tribe was, their relation to the spirits and sources of power, to nature, plants and animals. Black Elk, a member and a holy man of the Oglala Sioux, described how visions are quested for and understood in his tribe.⁶ We will use his comments mainly to reflect on how important it was that images from the visions received were connected to daily life in a way by which the daily could bring one closer to the vision.

Black Elk speaks of a man named Crazy Horse who became the chief of the tribe because of the power he had been granted in a vision. When he was engaged in battle he would think of the world of his vision and be reassured, enabling him to “go through

⁶ The words of Black Elk were transcribed by John Neihardt in *Black Elk Speaks* (1932, 1961) and Joseph Epes Brown in *The Sacred Pipe* (1953, 1971). Quotes directly from Black Elk are designated simply as “in Neihardt” or “in Brown.”

anything and not be hurt.” He carried a stone with him in battle that he had seen in his vision. It served to relate him to the vision and to draw the strength from the vision that would aid in his protection. Even his name was taken from the name of the horse in his vision who had “danced around like a horse made only of shadow” (in Neihardt, 1961:85). Thus his identity in the daily world was integrated with the imagery from the visionary realm.

Black Elk’s personal experience amplifies this further. He had had a vision when just a boy that he had been afraid to tell anyone about. He had become progressively undermined by it because of his attitude towards it. Finally, he told the medicine man about it, who responded,

Nephew, I know now what the trouble is! You must do what the bay horse in your vision wanted you to do. You must do your duty and perform this vision for your people upon earth. You must have the horse dance [from the vision] first for the people to see. Then the fear will leave you; but if you do not do this something very bad will happen to you.

In Neihardt, 1961:165

His vision had concerned his relation to his troubled people and Black Elk had, although not consciously, forgotten, ignored and undervalued his vision. This had left him in a disturbed state. The medicine man reminds him of the value of the vision and of the fact that it should be shared and brought into relation with the daily life of the tribe. This was done by reconstructing the vision in a pageant. Scenes and images from the vision were painted on “sacred tepees.”

Black Elk was told he must not eat anything until the horse dance was over. He had to purify himself in a sweat lodge with sage. He shared the songs from his vision with a select few who then taught various members of the tribe to sing them for the re-enactment of the vision. The members of the tribe were cast as the people and animals who had appeared in the vision, and all were

painted and costumed appropriately. Through this performance the vision reappeared to Black Elk as it had so many years before. “The fear that was on me so long was gone, and when thunder clouds [also images from his vision] appeared I was always glad to see them, for they came as relatives now to visit me.” As long as the world of the vision was neglected, the Indian felt in disharmony. By actively valuing it, sacrificing to it, and allowing its images to come into daily life, a healing effect was produced. “Even the horses seemed to be healthier and happier after the dance” (in Neihardt, 1960:179). The power of the vision enabled Black Elk to heal members of the tribe.

Inherent in their seeking of visions is a certain attitude of respect for the power and order of the world. As had the ancient Greeks, Black Elk learned to pay homage to the forces and to prepare himself for his meeting with them through the vision. “It is necessary to go far from people when lamenting,” when crying for a vision. “When going out to lament it is necessary to choose a wise old medicine man, ⁷ who is quiet and generous, to help. He must fill and offer the pipe to the Six Powers and to the four-leggeds and the wings of the air, and he must go along to watch.” “For if things are not done in the right way, something very bad can happen, and even a serpent could come and wrap itself around the lamenter” (in Brown, 1953:45).

When going out to “lament” Black Elk fasted for four days, drinking only water. He purified himself in a sweat lodge made with willow boughs set on the ground and bent down to make a round top.

Over this we had a bison robe. In the middle we put hot stones, and when I was in there, Few Tails [the medicine man] poured water on the stones. I sang to the spirits while I was in there being purified. Then the

⁷ Joseph Epes Brown translates *wichasha wakan* as a holy man, not medicine man as in Neihardt’s transcriptions.

old man rubbed me all over with the sacred sage. He then braided my hair, and I was naked except that I had a bison robe to wrap around me while lamenting in the night.

In Neihardt, 1960:185-7

He removed his clothes to show that he was “poor to things of the world.” He cried out for he was “humbling himself, remembering his nothingness in the presence of the Great Spirit” (in Brown, 1953:54).

Once when Black Elk returned to his tribe after crying for a vision, his people were so discouraged and sad that he was instructed to perform the vision he had received with *heyokas*, sacred fools “who do everything wrong or backwards to make the people laugh.” It

is planned that the people shall be made to feel jolly and happy first, so that it may be easier for the power [from the vision] to come to them. You have noticed that the truth comes into this world with two faces. One is sad with suffering, and the other laughs; but it is the same face, laughing or weeping. When people are already in despair, maybe the laughing face is better for them; and when they feel too good and are too sure of being safe, maybe the weeping face is better for them to see. I think that is what the *hey oka* ceremony is for

In Neihardt, 1961:192-3

Black Elk had never told anyone *all* of his greatest vision. He understood that to do so would dissipate its power. Similarly, if we are careless in sharing our dreams and waking dreams without a clear purpose in doing so, we seem to lose much of their benefit through not showing them respect.

This sense of relation to the vision, as we shall see, differs

from much of modern psychology. For Black Elk the vision was not reduced to, or assimilated by, the daily life. The attempt was made to bring the daily life into relation with the vision. The images of the visions were the guides in this relation. They had power and through them the daily world was transformed. The lamenter must

always be careful lest distracting thoughts come to him, yet he must be alert to recognize any messenger which the Great Spirit may send to him, for these people often come in the form of an animal, even one as small and insignificant as a little ant. Perhaps a Spotted Eagle may come to him from the West, or a Black Eagle from the North, or the Bald Eagle from the East, or even the red headed woodpecker may come to him from the South. And even though none of these may speak to him at first, they are important and should be observed. The “lamenter” should also notice if one of the little birds should come, or even perhaps a squirrel . . . All these people are important, for in their own way they are wise and they can teach us two-leggeds much if we make ourselves humble before them.

Within the vision the Indian does not remain himself, but

actually identifies himself with, or becomes, the quality or principle of the being or thing which comes to him in a vision, whether it be a beast, a bird, one of the elements, or really any aspect of creation. In order that this power may never leave him, he always carries with him some material form representing the animal or object from which he has received his “power.” These objects have often been incorrectly called fetishes, whereas they actually correspond more precisely to what the Christian call guardian angels, since for the Indian, the animals and birds and all things, are the “reflections” — in material form — of the

Divine principles. The Indian is only attached to the form for the sake of the principle which is contained within the form!

In Brown, 1971:58,45

Each creature is regarded as sacred because each has a *wochangi* or influence through which it is possible to gain understanding if one is attentive. Whereas modern man usually tries to understand the image with rational knowledge and the metaphor through its concrete referent, the Oglala Sioux acknowledged in their actions that it may be the material which belongs to the metaphor, to the imaginal.

