

Dreams, Rituals and the Dark Night of the Species Soul

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A video of this talk, with powerpoint slides, can be found at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AofnwPE-nUdJ3cSqvTYU-CvtZh-aOgO5/view>

Introduction

Welcome everyone to this gathering of our depth-oriented Jungian community to reflect on the topic of 'Dreams, Rituals and The Dark Night of the Species Soul'. I honor you for signing up for this presentation, considering its dark material. But perhaps, like me, you are looking for a place where you can reflect upon your deepest concerns in a community of thoughtful people. It reminds me of an insight that emerged during my three years of living in Hiroshima, Japan in the early 1980s where I conducted a project of collecting the dreams of *hibakusha* or A-bomb survivors, along with the dreams of anyone else who had experienced the full effects of a nuclear blast in a nuclear nightmare, those who might be called 'imaginal hibakusha'. (1) After reviewing many dreams, a typical scenario emerged, an archetypal pattern, if you will, in which a nuclear missile would streak through the sky and land just on the other side of a low mountain. The people who were out walking or going about their business that day would stare up at the streaking missile and emit a collective gasp as it landed. The beginnings of a mushroom cloud could be seen forming above the ridge and everyone knew that the outer ring of the blast would reach them in the next 30 seconds or so. The question on everyone's mind was this: *how do I want to spend that time?* And then, in multiple dreams and across cultural divides, people would gather in circles of 8-12, silently put their arms over their neighbor's shoulder, lean their heads into the circle and await the arrival of the blast that would incinerate them. It is a stark image, sobering in its intensity. It gives a picture of the human instinct to move toward community in the presence of mass death. And not just any kind of community, but a 'community in the round', that is, a community in the shape of a mandala.

In the nearly 40 years since this archetypal image presented itself to me, I have often wondered what would change if the time frame were expanded. What if it were 30 minutes before the blast hit? What about 3 hours? What if it were 3 days? 3 months? 3 years? *How would I want to spend that time?*

Invocation

My point here is that when humans are faced with their own extinction, they like to gather in small groups. This is a good thing, and is what Baker and Harvey mean when they say in their book Savage Grace: Living Resiliently in the Dark Night of the Globe: "*Our work as awake human beings at this time then, is to be willing to descend into the dark night of the globe as well as the dark night of the individual soul and to do so in connection with trusted allies. Going downward and inward is the only way we can open to the mystery of the Self and be guided by it through whatever unfolds.*" (2) So let's align ourselves with the in-born, archetypal intent to form communities of trusted allies when faced with the imagination of the dark night. And let's

not limit our trusted allies to the people on this Zoom call, but open it to our ancestors, including the indigenous people of the land upon which we live, whom we just honored on Monday as part of Indigenous People's Day. And what about the future beings, the ones for whom we want to be 'beloved ancestors'? Let's invite them into our gathering circle. After all, are we not in a partnership with them to make it possible for them to be born? Who else can we count as trusted allies to go downward and inward into the topic of the dark night of the species soul? Let's not limit our circle to human beings, but open it to the animal, plant and mineral kingdoms as well. Let's call in the weather beings and the water and mountain beings. In fact, let's call a "Council of All Beings" to witness our deliberations today. They all have a stake in the topic of the dark night of the species soul. After all, human beings are the single most significant geological force on this planet and will determine the fate of the earth as it moves toward the next stage of its evolution. As we imagine the various beings of the earth gathering around our circle tonight, encouraging us in our efforts to become more conscious about the plight of the planet, I will light a candle and invite you to see their faces and silently, in your heart, say their names. *May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our heart be always acceptable in their sight. ... May it be so!*

Now that the Invisibles are here to support and guide us, we can proceed with our topic tonight – dreams, rituals and the dark night of the species soul.

The Thesis: Depth Psychology as a Hermeneutic Lens

It is my thesis that as a culture we are swimming in a psychic soup of apocalyptic stories, images and symbols of nuclear war, social injustice, anthropogenic climate change, and global pandemics. As a result, we are experiencing high levels of anxiety about the human future, which I am calling 'extinction anxiety'. This anxiety is so strong and pervasive that mighty engines of cultural repression are at work to numb our feelings and prevent recognition of the object of our fear and our worst nightmare -- the extinction of the human species. But if we are willing to turn toward this psychic soup; if we can learn how to ride the dark emotions that arise rather than turn away from them, then, I suggest, we will be given the seeds of a new revelation. I want to make the claim that apocalyptic imagery and extinction anxiety are promptings from the sentience of the earth herself, inviting human beings to walk through a threshold toward personal, cultural and planetary renewal. In other words, humanity is embarked on a generations-long, collective initiation process guided by the 'birth-death-rebirth' dynamics of the archetype of initiation. Furthermore, this process is being instigated by a sentient earth in its yearning to restore itself to a dynamic equilibrium of systemic wholeness in compensation to the one-sided degradation of the planet by the greed and myopia of the human species. Our capacity to 'sustain the gaze' of the threat of extinction has the power of revelation, to wake us up to new stories and worldviews capable of sustaining human beings on a regenerated planet Earth. The suffering that will take place during this transformation of consciousness will be immense – is immense in many parts of the globe -- and I assert that the theories of Jungian Depth Psychology offer a profound way to navigate this ocean of suffering. While the transformation of collective consciousness is an immense topic, tonight I want to talk about the image of the dark night of the species soul, how our dreams can provide a compass for this journey, and how rituals can serve as collective anchors to keep communities alive and functioning so as to become sources of cultural regeneration.

Now, these are heavy topics and you may wonder by what authority I am qualified to be speaking about such matters. After all, I am not a clinical psychologist nor a Jungian Analyst. I am not an expert in climate change nor a political scientist. Not only that, but I am a privileged, white, heterosexual, middle class male. That said, my Ph.D. is in Liberal Arts, which means I am intensely interested in who I am and who I can become in the midst of this historical moment in which I find myself. Since its golden years in the 12th century school of Liberal Arts at Chartres Cathedral in France, the ancestors of my craft of the Liberal Arts have been on a singular quest -- to align their inner life with the harmony of the cosmos. (3) As a liberal artist in that tradition, I am acutely aware that the method I use to analyze anything will determine what I can see. As a result, I am a student of hermeneutics, of interpretive frames, and how they limit and condition what I can know. So when I turn my gaze to this historical moment – a moment rife with trauma, fear, injustice and dread -- it matters how I approach the task.

My chosen hermeneutic, the spectacles through which I am going to look at this topic of dreams, rituals and the dark night of the species soul, is Jungian depth psychology, that tradition of inquiry that harks back to the Orphic mysteries and the Neo-Platonists, the alchemists and the grail seekers, the romantic poets and Goethean scientists, and all lovers of beauty and the imagination. In the late nineteenth century in Europe, this tradition took on the veneer of a ‘science of the soul’ in the work of Freud and Jung. There are many other approaches one could take to this topic, and they would reveal other insights, but I prefer depth psychology. Why? In answer to that question I want to describe what I consider the ethos, the mood or the emotional atmosphere in which the work of depth psychology is conducted.

The Ethos of Depth Psychology

First, depth psychology is about the generation of meaning. As Jung pointed out, what happens to us is only half the story. The other half is the meaning we make of it. I am reminded of the work of Viktor Frankl, the founder of Logotherapy, who spoke from his own experience when he said that even concentration camps are bearable if one can find meaning in the suffering and death. (4) When considering the dark night of the species soul, it’s not only that bad things are happening to us. The other half is the meaning we make of this suffering. For example, it could be the just desserts for a species hellbent on destroying itself. On the other hand, that level of suffering could be the only way the larger systems of the earth can get our attention in order to communicate to us about their needs, waking us up to specific instructions on how we can create a more hospitable and sustainable ecological niche for the human species.

Second, a depth psychological approach is always about interiority. It is always about going ‘down and in’, of deep reflection upon the currents of our own souls as well as on the interiority of the beings of the outer world, the Anima Mundi, the soul of the world. Looking within, we see an incredibly rich world, with whole communities that demand our attention. These are not mere fantasies or disordered sense impressions, but the inner dimensions of the outer world appearing in the mirror of our soul, and they deserve to be recognized and given life too. When given a space to speak, what do the voices of interiority have to say? Perhaps they have the answers to the causes of our suffering that the outer world cannot even formulate.

A third quality of a depth psychological approach is ‘reverence’. The great Irish poet and philosopher John O’Donohue says it best, “*A reverence of approach awakens depth and enables us to be truly present where we are. When we approach with reverence, great things decide to approach us. Our real life comes to the surface and its light awakens the concealed beauty in things.*” (5). An approach of reverence is essential to a soulful life. If we approach our inner worlds seeking flaws and defects, we will never get beneath the surface where the beauty and inner communion reside. An approach of reverence invites revelation, intimacy and awe to enter our soul and reveals its sacred depths. In the midst of the ugliness of a world that is undergoing a traumatic transformation, an attitude of reverence allows us to see the beauty of the larger patterns at work as the earth goes about her sacred work of evolving.

A fourth attribute of depth psychology is its ongoing quest for healing, for the restoration of Soul to its rightful place of dignity and wholeness. This requires a nose for the wounded places in the world and in ourselves, a task that requires the courage of the ER doctor in the midst of treating a ravaged body. Like that doctor, looking away is not an option. A life force hangs in the balance and depends on us, whether it is a wounded imaginal being in our personal soul or a wounded impulse in the collective. In either case, we bring our compassion and skill to bear on what it takes to return that bloodied and broken soul-part back to wholeness. This cannot be done without a long apprenticeship to the broken parts of ourselves. This is the work of the archetype of the wounded healer who knows how to be at home in the midst of darkness and suffering and who has the patience to wait for the light of healing to miraculously appear.

So in the spirit of these four qualities of depth psychology— meaning, interiority, reverence and healing -- let’s apply a depth psychological lens to dreams, rituals and the dark night of the species soul, beginning with the dark night.

The Dark Night of the Species Soul

The future is a blank canvas for our imagination. Who knows what is going to happen? But the imagination can only use the images it already knows to understand what it doesn’t. For example, when it comes to global warming, there are at least six different imaginations about the future. (6) One says there is no such thing as global warming. It’s fake news. A second says that yes, there is global warming, but it is part of a natural cycle that has happened before. Some places may even benefit from higher temperatures. A third says that what we are experiencing is not natural. It’s caused by human activity, but we’ve got time to get it under control. A fourth imagination admits that climate change is entering a critical stage and that we need to lobby congress to get it under control within the next few decades or we will experience big problems. A fifth imagination says that political entities are not doing nearly enough to mitigate the disasters that are coming, but hopefully our species will soon wake up and take drastic steps to avert total environmental and societal collapse. And a sixth imagination says sorry, it’s too late. A cascade of tipping points has been crossed. Even if we were to stop using fossil fuels today, 40 years of exponentially worsening conditions are baked into the future. The climate is becoming inhospitable for humans and most mammals. We can expect a severe collapse of the structures of human civilization, while small pockets of habitability may continue to sustain human existence.

Of course the end of the world as we know it has been the topic of discussion by philosophers, mystics and prophets for millennia. But science, as represented by the most recent UN report on the climate, makes it clear that only scenarios five and six are supported by the facts. They call it a “Red Alert For Humanity”. (7) Whether a Great Turning or a Great Unravelling awaits, it’s darkness in the near term, regardless. What are we supposed to do with that bleak imagination of the future? The answer for the vast majority of humans is clear: Denial.

When I first encountered the work of Joanna Macy, the great Gaian Teacher and Buddhist social activist, I was living in Hiroshima, Japan in the early 1980’s and sinking under the weight of the guilt of being an American in a city annihilated by my country of origin and suffering from compassion fatigue in working with *hibakusha* and other peace activists. The images of nuclear holocaust embedded in the city are so stark they sear the soul, and my despair over the future was intense. So it was balm to my soul to read an excerpt from Joanna’s first book, *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age* in a magazine called *Evolutionary Blues*. (8) She wrote that through our despair for the planet and its exquisite beings, we are initiated into an awareness of the essential unity of the web of life, a sense of mutual belonging that can lead to wonder, even joy. She called this expansion of identity ‘the greening of the self’. Emotions of anger and despair are not the enemy; denial is. Hope does not come from hiding our emotions or listening only to good news. Hope comes from community and action. What is needed is the courage to sustain the gaze of Hiroshima’s terror and work from the truth of that place.

This made a lot of sense to me, so I followed the work of Joanna Macy over the decades, through its phases of Despair and Empowerment work, Deep Ecology work and then the Work That Reconnects, I was especially intrigued by her formulation of what she calls ‘The Great Turning’, the idea that humanity as a whole is embarked on a great transformative path away from an industrial growth society to a life-sustaining society. Activists -- meaning anyone acting for a purpose larger than personal gain or advantage -- are oriented toward three mutually reinforcing dimensions of the Great Turning-- holding actions in defense of life on earth, structural changes needed for a sustainable world, and a fundamental shift in worldview and values. (9)

In the many workshops I attended over the years, one question was asked over and over: did Joanna think we were going to make it? That is, are we involved in a Great Unravelling leading to the collapse of society and possibly the extinction of humanity or did she think the Great Turning was still possible, despite the mounting evidence of catastrophe that grew more dire by the year? She had several answers to this question. One was, what difference would it make to your actions in the present? We have to act now without attachment to the outcomes of our actions. The future beings are counting on us to be ‘good ancestors’. Acting as if the Great Turning is possible is the only moral option. The key is not to take it all on by yourself, but to find allies and work in groups. Another answer she would give is: it depended on how she felt when she got up that day. Some mornings she didn’t think we were going to make it, some mornings she did. But in her most recent writing, an essay co-written earlier this year with Sean Kelly entitled *The Great Turning: Reconnecting Through Collapse*, Joanna writes the following: “... the idea of the Great Turning has always been paired with the recognition that we are in the accelerating phase of the Great Unraveling of the web of life. ... Until relatively recently, when presenting the idea of the Great Turning and in practicing the work, it was assumed by most that there was still a fighting chance to halt the Great Unraveling and to transition to a life

sustaining society without having to pass through a phase of collapse. While we recognize an inescapable uncertainty in such assessments, we have come to expect the inevitability of collapse. This expectation is based on the fact that the industrial growth society which has brought us to the threshold of ecological catastrophe is inherently unsustainable and shows signs of ever-increasing fragility.” (10)

Of course, being the great teacher that she is, Joanna is always quick to point out that in listening to news of collapse and the possible extinction of the species, there is always something bracing and vitalizing about hearing the truth of our situation. Failure to speak truth, she reminds us, leads to psychic numbing, which in turn leads to an impairment of sorely needed cognitive capacities. Re-framing our despair as our love for the planet can lead to gratitude and joy even in the darkest moments.

But in recent years, as the evidence of near-term collapse mounted around me, and the academic discipline of ‘collapsology’ began to take shape in Europe and elsewhere, I began to feel that the term “Great Turning’ was too tame for what I was feeling. My thesis that humanity is undergoing a collective rite of passage and is in the dying phase of the birth-death-rebirth cycle, needed a term with more gravitas, something that upon hearing it required me to sit up and take notice. I found that term in the work of Christopher Bache, author of Dark Night, Early Dawn: Toward a Deep Ecology of Mind and LSD and the Mind of the Universe. (11) As a professor of philosophy and religious studies, Bache undertook a research regimen of 73 high-dose LSD sessions over a period of 20 years and took meticulous notes of his experiences. The perspective provided by the psychedelics made him acutely aware that in addition to the dynamics of his own personal psyche, he was deeply immersed in dynamic fields of collective memory that he called the ‘species mind’. The entities he encountered in altered states spoke to him of the dark night of the species soul. Now this was a phrase with gravitas, grounded in the imagery of St. John of the Cross, the 16th century Spanish mystic. The concept of the dark night is often invoked in psychotherapy to describe a particularly difficult period in a person’s life, but as depicted by St. John, it is more than that. It is the final stage of a long spiritual process that culminates in a spiritual death and rebirth. In the dark night of the species soul, Bache writes, we are talking about species ego-death, the collapse of deeply embedded paradigms in the collective mind and rebirth into something we cannot yet imagine. (12)

This parallels the development of Jung’s idea of the collective unconscious. In the beginning of his career, Jung emphasized a more psychological reading of the archetypes, seeing them as inherited psychological structures within the human personal and collective unconscious, innate dispositions to act that precede and shape individual experience. In his later years, Jung extended his understanding of archetypes beyond the psychological domain and into the world. His study of synchronicity and quantum physics led him to see archetypes as principles operating not just in our personal psychology, not just in our collective humanity but also in the larger sphere of nature itself, connecting our inner experience and outer circumstances in meaningful and striking ways. (13). This has led some Jungian theorists to hypothesize that in addition to the ‘personal unconscious’ of Freud and the ‘collective unconscious’ for which Jung is so famous, there is a ‘world unconscious’, consisting of the inner subjectivity of the things of the outer world, the Anima Mundi, the soul of the world. (14) Like the living systems of the earth, psychic structures are a nested hierarchy– the personal unconscious is embedded in the collective unconscious,

which is embedded in the world unconscious. Psychic images move throughout these hierarchies, making it possible for the subjectivity of the earth to communicate with the species soul and appear within the psyche of the individual soul, and vice-versa. Inspired by the work of Jung, authors such as Ervin Laszlo, Rupert Sheldrake and Paul Levy (15) have been mapping the terrain of these psychic fields using the categories of quantum physics, which has a knack for accounting for the ‘strange and weird’ experiences that occur when images and information are shuffled between the various levels of consciousness. Of course, at the level of the human ego, it’s not just a matter of passively receiving these images from the depths of the earth, but of preparing an ego capable of holding their power.

Dreams as Compass

So where are we in so far in this presentation? We have done an invocation of the Invisibles, we have discussed the hermeneutic lens of Jungian depth psychology through which we are looking at this material, and we have described how we are swimming not only in our own personal psychology but also in shifting archetypal energies in the collective mind, the ‘species soul’, of humanity, which in turn are embedded in the World Soul. If you are still with me after all this, it means that, at least for now, you are willing to stay with the troubles of it all, to ‘sustain the gaze’ of its distress. The question now is, how are we going to navigate these dark waters? From whence are we going to receive the guidance that will see us through the birth-death-rebirth cycle to something we would recognize as ‘deliverance’? This is a question that many thoughtful people are asking themselves these days. Responses I find of particular value come from the work of Jungian Analyst Ann Baring and her amazing book on the return of the feminine, *The Dream of the Cosmos*; the Deep Adaptation movement of Jem Bendell as described in the book *Deep Adaptation: Navigating the Realities of Climate Chaos*; the re-visioning of human development espoused by Bill Plotkin, most recently in his book on *Soul Initiation*; and the re-imagination of the beloved community offered by Valerie Kaur in her book on Revolutionary Love. (16)

They are all genuine artisans of cultural transformation and I honor their contributions. But in answering this question for myself, and therefore what I would like to share with you, I turn to the writing of the Eco-theologian Thomas Berry. In his terrific essay entitled *The Dream of the Earth*, from his book of the same name, Thomas Berry addresses the very question we are asking: where do we go to get the guidance we need to navigate the confusion of our times? He begins by saying we are unlikely to find guidance in our cultural traditions, what he calls our ‘cultural coding’, because those traditions are themselves the source of our current difficulties. Instead, he says, “*It appears necessary that we go beyond our cultural coding, to our genetic coding for guidance.*” (17) He goes on to explain that this genetic coding is grounded in the creative processes of the earth itself. The earth, he says, shapes not only the physical structure of the human being, but its psychic structure as well. This is what Jung meant when he said that the archetypes are not within us, we are in the archetypes. Those archetypes are the patterns of the earth’s processes mirrored in the human psyche.

So how does a sentient earth communicate with us? Through the same source that inspired our current, now outmoded cultural myths. He writes, “*The new cultural coding that we need must emerge from the source of all such codings, from revelatory vision that comes to us in those*

special psychic moments, or conditions, that we describe as “dream.” We are, of course, using this term not only as regards the psychic processes that take place when we are physically asleep but also as a way of indicating an intuitive, non-rational process that occurs when we awaken to the numinous powers ever present in the phenomenal world about us, powers that possess us in our high creative moments. Poets and artists continually invoke these spirit powers, which function less through words than through symbolic forms.” (18) We experience these numinous powers of revelatory vision in what Berry calls ‘spontaneities’, that is, the dreams, synchronicities, intuitions, intense feeling states, body symptoms, epiphanies, and other psychic phenomena that we experience as visitations from something outside of our ego, something ‘other’. This ‘other’ might be sourced from our personal unconscious, the collective unconscious or the world unconscious. Berry writes, *“Through the archetypal symbols of the unconscious, the symbols of the Great Journey, Death-Rebirth, the Cosmic Tree, and the Sacred Center, we establish vital contact with those underlying energies that guide and sustain the human soul. These energies find expression especially in our dreams.”* (19) In other words, because the human psyche is structured by the same intelligence that structured the earth, humans are capable of perceiving that intelligence. When that intelligence announces itself within the precincts of the human psyche, it appears through the archetypal symbolism of dream.

And what would be the subject matter of the symbols that appear in those dreams? What would they be trying to tell us? In Jung’s theory of psychic energy and dreams, the answer is clear. The dreams are trying to tell us what we need to know in order to heal, that is, to eliminate the blocks that prevent us from experiencing a free flow of psychic energy that is in harmony with the formative processes of the earth. As we have already seen, those blocks may come from the trauma of our personal circumstances, but they are also blocks that come from the trauma embedded in the collective memory of our culture. Increasingly, now, the blocks to the free flow of psychic energy are coming from the trauma of the earth herself.

And what would such a dream look like that might be oriented to the healing of the species soul? When I asked myself this question in the hopes of being able to illustrate my thesis, I immediately thought of my Jeroshini dream. It’s not an ideal example because there is not a lot of nature symbolism in the content. Nature symbolism and landscapes in dreams are often a portal to the world soul. (20) But I did have this dream in a very special natural setting. It occurred in October of 2016 while on a vision quest in Two Goddess Canyon near the Bear’s Ears National Monument of Utah. I had just retired from my teaching career of 40 years and I was looking for guidance on what lay ahead for me. We had just arrived in base camp and the next day we would begin our four-day fast. I was exhausted from the hike and immediately fell asleep and had the following dream:

It is like a Japanese or Chinese epic film. I am looking down on the courtyard of a great castle. Below me I see that Jeroshini, who is dressed in white, has been taken prisoner by 10,000 warriors, all dressed in black, for preaching against the Dark Lord in the Dark Lord’s castle. He walks across the courtyard of the dank, grey castle with 10,000 arrows pointed at him. He glances up to see an image of the Dark Lord’s crest on a tall stone lantern. The crest is a circle with a horizon and half sun that is either rising or setting, all in different shades of grey. It is etched onto the side of the stone lantern. When he sees that crest, Jeroshini knows what to do. He waits for the right moment, then twirls his staff, takes a few quick steps and leaps up to the

lantern. He grabs the crest off of the lantern and uses it as a microphone. He speaks through it using the voice of the Dark Lord. All the arrows that were loosed towards him as he made his move, now fall to the ground, broken in half. The voice of the narrator of this tale now appears, saying "And this is the first time in story that birds have fallen from the sky." Small black birds fall out of the sky and -- plop, plop, plop – their bodies lie amongst the broken arrows. Jeroshini walks free, as do the warriors, who are now liberated from the trance placed upon them by the Dark Lord. The narrator goes on to say that ever since this time there have been two ways or paths. There is the path of the Samurai, which is the way of violence and chaos. And there is the path of the Magician, whose task is to explore the mysteries and bend them toward peace. The vision of the story fades and I see the Japanese Buddhist priest who was narrating this tale walking down a dusty Japanese street in what seems like late 18th century Japan. He is talking to a member of his temple about some mundane matter. I am amazed at the whole thing.

Then I find myself walking into a modern Japanese cosmetic shop. Not sure why I am here, but as long as I am, I ask for some face cream. I could use it on the Vision Quest. Vision Quest? It slowly dawns on me that I am on a Vision Quest and that I am sleeping in base camp and beginning to wake up. At the same moment I open my eyes, the sun is rising on the eastern horizon right in front of my face. The light is streaming towards me, so bright that, for a moment, I am blinded. ... End of dream.

So we could spend the rest of our time tonight analyzing this dream. My point in telling it now is first of all to marvel, as I do at every dream, at the sheer intelligence and creativity of it. Jeroshini? Never heard the name before. Ripping an engraved crest off of a stone lantern? How is that even possible? Using the round crest as a microphone to impersonate the voice of the Dark Lord as a way to break a trance and liberate both himself and the 10,000 soldiers? Who thought that up and what does that even mean? But here are all the elements of a dream shaped by my personal complexes, addressing issues in the collective mind, and inspired by the world unconscious. It all takes place in a mandala, the Sacred Center of the four walls of the castle. It is a story of Liberation as Jeroshini frees himself and his former captors from the spell that had been created by the Dark Lord. It is dreamed a month before the unlikely election of Donald Trump, when questions of evil, cults and trance erupt into the conscious awareness of the collective. The synchronicity of waking to the light of a rising sun suggests that the sacred grounds of Two Goddess Canyon were involved in the creation of this dream. And where is the healing? It is in the hints being given to me about the nature of evil, how to break a collective trance and the healing power of landscapes. The dream is a visitation from the World Soul, the dream of the earth, announcing the nature of my soul task on behalf of healing myself, my community and the planet. The next four days would be about preparing myself well enough to receive these images and take responsibility for them.

So if dreams like this are arising in response to the dark night of the species soul, where can they be heard? Not everyone can tell a dream like this at a lecture for the Jung Society. Where do we go, in a dream-phobic culture, to share the new symbolic forms that are emerging in our eco-centric wisdom dreams in response to the distress of the Great Unravelling? This is the earth speaking; shouldn't she be heard? So let us turn our attention now to the ways in which community rituals can serve as venues for welcoming and communicating emerging eco-centric

symbolic forms and therefore serve as anchors in the rough waters of the dark night of the species soul.

Rituals As Community Anchors

There is a long and rich library of information on ritual and culture from a myriad of perspectives. What can't be denied is that ritual is a universal behavior in human beings covering an impressive array of human experiences – from birth and death rituals, to marking rites of passage, to celebrations, blessings, healings, and grief rituals. For our purposes today, we will define ritual using the words of the Jungian Analyst Robert Johnson who says that ritual consists of “*symbolic behaviors, consciously performed, in order to connect to our inner selves, focus and refine our religious insights and constellate psychological energy.*” (21)

Of course, there are many individual rituals that one can do alone. For example, every individual dream has a latent ritual within it. And there are infinite possibilities to do self-generated rituals for the purpose of dialoguing with the more than human world. But for our purposes today, let's focus on community rituals that might serve as anchors as we navigate the dark night of the species soul.

My first insight into the nature of rituals capable of anchoring the global community in response to the distress of the Great Unravelling came to me in a dream soon after returning from my time in Hiroshima. In the dream, Mother Theresa was speaking to me, saying “*Randy, the point is not to 'save' people, the point is to create the conditions for the possibility of Grace.*” This dream has been a blessing from the other world, a gift that keeps on giving. It is saying that it is not my job to change or transform people. My job is to create the conditions where the sacred quality of Grace can enter the scene and do its transformative work on whoever it will, whether they are ready or not. I can get more skillful at creating containers for that work, but I cannot be responsible for the role that Grace will play in what happens. This principle operates whether I am talking to someone in my office, teaching a class or facilitating a large community ritual. As a ritual leader, my goal is to create the conditions wherein a divine force can enter the ritual field for the purposes of transformation and healing, that is, for aligning the ritual field and the beings within it to the formative forces of the earth. So what are the archetypal elements of ritual? For the kind of earth-based rituals I want to talk about, I can think of three main elements.

First, to be an effective ritual, all symbolic gestures need to take place within an internally consistent cosmology. If the symbolic gestures are outside of one's traditional cosmology, the high levels of psychic energy necessary to effect transformation cannot be generated. So what tradition do all traditions belong to that would make it possible for all forms of spirituality to be welcome in the same ritual space? Jung answered that question by hypothesizing that all religions are forms of individuation symbolism emanating from the archetype of the Self. (22) But as we have seen, this explanation tends to emphasize the human dimensions of the issue. When we allow the subjectivity of the earth, the Anima Mundi, to be a part of the equation, as Jung did in his later work, when the Dream of the Earth has its place in the ongoing world drama of creation, we are in the midst of what Thomas Berry calls The Universe Story – the largest cosmological story that can be told because it accounts for the ongoing creation of a sentient Universe. (23) It's the 13.5 billion year old story of the origin and evolution of our cosmos. As

Berry says, it's not about cosmology, but cosmogenesis; not a state of being but an activity. And the goal of that cosmogenesis is the creation of higher levels of consciousness. Jung is clear about this: humans are destined to be the carriers of the next stage of the evolution of consciousness of the earth. But only if they can develop an ego both strong and flexible enough to carry it.

So am I advocating for a new religion, a new container for the religious instinct in humans? No. Jung makes the case, as does Thomas Berry, that the Universe Story is not a new myth in competition with all the others, but rather a way to elucidate and validate every current religion, by giving more conscious and comprehensive expression to its essential meaning. It is universally applicable because it is consistent with the evolution of the cosmos itself. In fact, a variety of symbolic expressions of the divine is welcomed because, as Berry writes, "The greater the diversity, the greater the integrity of the whole." Grounding an eco-centric ritual in the cosmology of The Universe Story creates a welcome mat for all humans, no matter their community affiliation. And because the universe is a communion of subjects and not a collection of objects, every eco-centric ritual welcomes the Council of All Beings. Rituals of this sort, grounded in the Universe Story, are deeply ecumenical and welcoming to the entire ark of humanity.

A second archetypal element of earth-based ritual is the creation of the altar or 'center piece' of the ceremony. The altar serves as the *axis mundi*, the cosmic center of the ritual. While altars often appear in circular shapes, the archetypal form of the mandala, they are best imagined as three-dimensional, in the shape of a gyroscope. Emerging from the center of the circle is a pillar of psychic energy going upward to the heavens or 'upper world' and another pillar moving downward into the earth or 'lower world'. The horizontal plane represents the here and now of the created world. When imagined in this way, the altar is a kind of engine – it generates energy, it gives out a call to the interiority of the world, the Anima Mundi. And what kind of a call is it making? That depends on the intention of the ritual, the conscious purpose that created the ritual in the first place. A clear intention is essential because it will determine what shows up in response to the call. That intention is made manifest by the choice of symbolic forms that are placed on the altar and the petitions made in prayer. Once the call is made, it is important to create solid boundaries capable of containing the energy that shows up. Erecting effective boundaries is an essential skill for creating the conditions for the possibility of Grace.

A third element of all eco-centric ritual is the psychic field that is created by the intentional call emanating from the altar. Psychic fields are generated and amplified by using ritual tools such as drums, rattles, chant, incense, dance, bells, etc. The goal is to intensify the images, making them more distinct and powerful, allowing them to move according to their own intentionality. At first, the images will dance around personal experiences, but as the trance state is deepened, the ego is relativized and the sense of being a separate individual surrounded by a group of other people begins to dissipate. The participant begins to merge with the mind of the group, becoming more transparent to their common ground. In deeper states of trance, the ritualist can access the ground of the world unconscious itself. Accessing these psychic fields is an essential aspect of the healing of our world because fields are open systems with porous boundaries. Not only do they allow us to participate in the feeling states of people very different from ourselves, but they also allow us access to the feeling states of the natural world, the Anima Mundi or

World Soul. Christopher Bache describes these communal states as follows: *“Other persons are spontaneously experienced as partners in a complex dance, and because of this dance we are not just separate beings but vital parts of living patterns. We are the dancing itself. One’s edges become softer and more porous, not in a pathological way that erodes individual agency but in a way which opens one to a felt connection with others and with the life process itself. Self-interest is not diminished but extended exponentially. One literally begins to live a larger life.”* (24) All ritual is in service to removing blocks to the free flow of psychic energy so that it can move into coherence with the large systems of the planet, allowing those larger systems to guide us into the next phase of humanity’s evolution.

Three Eco-Centric Rituals

Let me illustrate these ideas by focusing on three different kinds of rituals that can serve as community anchors in the dark night of the species soul – large community celebrations, grief ceremonies and small group creativity rituals.

The first community ritual I would like to describe started, appropriately enough, with a dream. In late 2009 my friend and colleague Molly Brown had the following dream: *I am looking down from above onto dark water. I see the outline of a boat decked out in Christmas lights, like the Christmas boat on Lake Union. It has a decorated Christmas Tree in the bow. I have a strong sense that something important is coming this way. Upon awaking I have an immediate realization: the Goddess is Coming!* In working with this dream, Molly had the sense that this tree was the Tree of Life, so she painted an image of it. She brought the image to me and together we decided we wanted to do an earth-based community ritual dedicated to a Celebration of the Tree of Life in the Time of the Great Turning. We thought, what the heck, let’s dream big, so we asked if it would be possible to host this event at St. Mark’s Cathedral in Seattle. Once we received permission and committed to the event, the spontaneities that Thomas Berry says are evidence of genetic guidance began to show up. The more we meditated on the Tree of Life, the more we realized how it represented the Dream of the Earth itself. Rooted in the cosmos, it is a symbol for the life-giving powers of the Universe Story.

The Celebration of the Tree of Life event took place on November 6, 2010, starting at 7pm. The evening was rainy and dark, with traffic backed up on the freeway. Nevertheless, the event was sold out with over 650 people filling the cathedral to capacity. There was dancing, storytelling, and singing, with a homily by Joanna Macy. Hearts were moved, joy and laughter mingled with tears, beauty was all around and for one evening, 650 people became transparent to one another, reveling in the sensation of moving as one soul through the dynamics of the ritual. Earth community was created in the preparations required to pull off such a complex event. Ritual gestures intensified the symbolic forms to create a trance state that loosened the grip of the isolated ego, allowing access to the group field. With the image of the Cosmic Tree at the center of the altar, a call was sent out to the Soul of the World and each individual heard the reply in their own way. These kinds of deeply ecumenical, earth-centric, large scale community rituals have the power to bind diverse communities together in their common struggle to navigate the dark night of the species soul while celebrating the gift of being alive.

A second type of ritual that can serve as an anchor in dark times is a grief ritual. Grief is ubiquitous in this time of global suffering and uncertainty. However, the isolation of grief in our individualistic culture makes it one of the emotions we fear the most. Our greatest fear is that, once started, it will never stop. But when we suppress the dark emotion of grief, we deaden our access to all emotion, including the positive emotions of love and joy. The spiritual guidance hidden in the inner recesses of our suffering is denied. Joanna Macy makes the point that these days the source of our sorrow lies less in concerns for our personal self and more in the perception of our collective suffering. It is the pain of the world manifesting in each of us. Experiencing it fully, she says, is absolutely necessary for our collective healing. (25) The Grief rituals I have co-led always begin with gestures of gratitude for the gift of being alive. Only then can we invite in the Angel of Grief to guide us through the mansion of the soul. In our ritual gestures, we move through spirals of psychic energy, laying down the foundations of the containers that will keep the aroused emotions from turning destructive. Instruction is given on the ways to express intense grief in a community ritual setting, including how to wail. Only after considerable preparation do we enter into a prolonged drumming session where the grief is given full permission to express itself. Anyone who has attended such a ritual knows the hair-raising experience it can be to be in a room of wailing people set against the pounding of drums. And yet something primal in us awakens, an awareness that this is how our ancestors have processed grief for generations. How can grief have so much energy, so much life? With permission to sob, and supported by the group field, we gain access to the genetic guidance that has been hidden in the darkness and depression of our repressed grief. As our culture moves more deeply into the dark night of the soul, grief rituals will be more essential than ever. Invariably, they are an initiation into the feral nature of the life force, an affirmation of the joy of being alive. If you are interested in attending such a ritual, I can recommend two possibilities. One is sponsored yearly by Rite of Passage Journeys in the month of November. The other is sponsored by the good people at Sacred Groves on Bainbridge Island. (26)

A third kind of ritual is smaller in scale, but no less important. It follows from the idea that the spontaneities through which the Dream of the Earth expresses itself need to be brought into the light of day. Why should a dream inspired by the Dream of the Earth be isolated in a journal or shared only with a therapist? The purpose of a community Soul Night ritual is to create a container for sharing with our community our creative encounters with the unconscious. When we share the spontaneities that have occurred in our experience -- what has inspired us from the unconscious -- we become portals and oracles for the healing power of the Anima Mundi, the world soul. This is a crucial function of the creative arts in this time, to serve as a medium for the voice of the earth. But arts completely democratized – everyone as artist, because everyone dreams. The Seattle Jung Society will be hosting such a ritual on December 8, 2021. Everyone is welcome to join the gathering, whether as presenter or witness. It will open with ritual gestures to gather the Invisibles and bring our hearts into coherence. Then we will ask those members who have signed up in advance to take no more than five minutes each to present to the group some product that has emerged from their dialogue with the unconscious – a particularly powerful dream, a poem, a painting, a song, a short story, a teaching vignette, a revelation from nature, etc. After each presentation, there will be a short moment of silence to allow the ‘soul offering’ to echo into the soul of the community, before we turn our attention to the next offering. Our goal is to create a space that is receptive to what John O’Donohue calls ‘the quiet

light that shines in every heart'. (27) When all the offerings are complete, we will have an opportunity to dialogue about how the images have echoed within our own souls. In this way, a Community of Soul is generated and the genetic guidance of the earth is liberated and heard. This is how new cultural myths are birthed.

So these are three examples of community rituals that can serve as anchors for navigating the dark night of the species soul. They are 'anchors' because they bring people together, enlarge the heart of compassion and create solidarity. Most importantly, they can be done without regard to the outer conditions of society, no matter how dire. Like the practice of gratitude, they are not dependent on outer circumstances. Rituals anchor the beloved community. They are venues for the practice of what Valerie Kaur calls "Revolutionary Love".

The Seattle Jung Society

I want to close my remarks tonight by bringing the notion of community back home, to the Seattle Jung Society itself. How can a small non-profit like the Seattle Jung Society serve as a welcome venue for the spontaneities of genetic guidance needed to navigate the dark night? This Society has been around since 1973 and for almost 50 years has served the greater Seattle community by offering lectures, workshops and classes on Jungian depth psychology. But now, as the Society goes through a transformation of leadership and designs a new website, we have an opportunity to re-imagine the needs of our members and offer them the kind of soul food that will satisfy their hunger for deep reflection on the pressing issues of our times. In a recent retreat, the board engaged in an exercise that yielded an interesting values mandala and a new Mission statement that reads as follows: *As a thoughtful learning community, we are on a mission to raise consciousness through fostering deep psychological and spiritual understanding of ourselves and the increasingly complex and challenging world around us. We strive to make Jungian and depth psychological thought accessible to the general public through workshops, seminars and other resources that help liberate the soul.* (28)

Naturally, as a new co-president of the Seattle Jung Society, I wonder how we can be of service in these opening years of the dark night of the species soul. How can we serve as what Joanna Macy calls a 'rough weather network' for our members? We could invite speakers that bring the depth psychological approach of meaning, interiority, reverence and healing to bear on such timely issues as social justice, the Covid epidemic and climate chaos. We could constellate forums and discussion groups on specific archetypes, such as the archetype of Apocalypse, the archetype of Justice or the archetype of the Feminine. We could initiate a Climate Café, adapted from the Death Café movement, that provides a simple, hospitable, empathic space where fears and uncertainties about our ecological crisis could be safely expressed. We could start an Anima Mundi Club that meets to discuss techniques for communicating with the soul of the world and then does field trips to natural settings to practice our techniques. How might we be of service to you? And, I would ask, how can you be of service to the mission of the Seattle Jung Society? We need donations to help pay for our new website, of course, but more importantly we need your sense of community service. Join or renew your membership to our learning community, volunteer as a board member or join a committee, share your ideas of how a depth psychological perspective can best serve the intentions of the Dream of the Earth. If you have any ideas or want to volunteer in any capacity, please contact us at office@jungseattle.net.

Closing

I began this talk by describing an archetypal dream that emerged from my research into nuclear nightmares while living in Hiroshima, Japan. That dream initiated me into how the threat of extinction can lead to the formation of the beloved community. It has been quite a while since I have had a nuclear bomb go off in my dreams, but just last June, as I was turning my thoughts to this talk, I had this dream:

I am camping with two friends on a ridge with a stunning view across a great plain, with the curvature of the earth in the distance. Feels like Eastern Washington, but the angle seems to be from the Canadian border looking South to Seattle. I am looking at the clouds in the far distance when they begin to roil. Emerging from them is the beginning of a mushroom cloud. Oh no! Sure enough, it gets bigger and extends higher into the sky. Based on the location, Seattle must be the epicenter. It's the only large city in that direction. I can begin to see the dust clouds expanding as the nuclear winds sweep out in a concentric circle. I estimate the outer edge of the blast will reach us in another 10-15 minutes, or so it seems. I can't believe that someone, a human being, actually made the choice to drop that bomb. I tell my friends we need to prepare for that blast reaching us. As we retreat into a nearby stand of trees, it slowly dawns on me that everyone I love is dead. What's the point of living? It feels like it is a curse to still be alive.

So there's the wound! That's what everyone is afraid of, spelled out in clear images. It's nihilism, pure and simple. And sure enough, in true shamanic fashion, I am given the disease and have to find the cure in time for this presentation. And this is it: before this talk you might have viewed this dream only through the lens of the personal unconscious, seeing in it the dynamics of a man entering his elder years and facing his mortality. Or perhaps you would be inclined to literalize the dream at the collective level and see in it the impending annihilation of humanity. But seen through the lens of depth psychology, and applying the ideas of the species soul and the dream of the earth, we can begin to see more deeply into this kind of apocalyptic imagery. What if we view the image of the bomb, like the image of climate chaos, and the extinction anxiety they produce, as a wakeup call to the human species, telling us that the old forms of consciousness which have governed our way of life, those familiar forms that we have loved like old friends, are doomed. We are in the midst of an 'egocide' of the species soul. (29) But we are being given the time between our awareness of the bomb and the arrival of its destruction to explore new forms of human development, new forms of the beloved community, new forms of governance, new forms of relating to the earth -- forms which must, of necessity, be in harmony with the on-going creative processes of the earth. What an opportunity! The generations alive today are being given the chance to live the most meaningful lives in the history of our species!!

And if this is a wake-up call, who is calling us? Our greatest hope lies in the answer. It is the dream of the earth, the inner dimensions of the outer world, the Anima Mundi, seeking human vessels through which to become conscious. Ever-faithful, ever-true, She is wrapping us in her arms and, through her genetic guidance, awakening us to our true nature as children of Gaia, as children of the Cosmos.

This concludes my formal remarks for tonight. Thank you for your attention. It is an honor to have been given the floor for this amount of time. That said, I am less concerned about whether or not you agree with something I said and more interested in whether or not I have been true to my dream. Have I created the conditions for the possibility of Grace? My ardent hope is that some element of my presentation, some word or image or idea, has sparked your imagination and created a field for the appearance of a ‘spontaneity’. If it has, consider the possibility that this spark is not just about you, but may be a message from deeper levels of the unconscious, perhaps a tap on the shoulder by the dream of the earth herself. To that end, I invite you, after we take a short 5-minute break, to join a small breakout room of three people that will be randomly generated by the wonders of Zoom technology. When you land there, I invite the person with the longest hair to be the host and timekeeper. After each person introduces themselves with a single sentence that includes their first name and their location, the host will invite a person to speak for five uninterrupted minutes guided by these three questions:

1. *What word, image, idea, or body sensation has resonated with your soul in response to this presentation?*
2. *What resources do you call upon to sustain you in these strenuous times?*
3. *Joanna Macy defines an activist as anyone acting for a purpose larger than personal gain or advantage. Activism has both inner and outer dimensions. What shape do you want your future activism to take?*

The responsibility of the other two people in the room is to actively listen as attentively as possible to what the speaker has to say, noting how their words resonate in the soul of the listener. Listening is an art. Let's practice it! The host can hold up a finger to let the person know when they have one minute left and then wave 10 fingers when the time has expired. When all three have gone, there should be another few minutes for group conversation. You will then see a one-minute warning to come back to the main room, during which time I invite you to affirm your commitment to confidentiality, thank your soul companions, and hit the return button.

When we return, I invite you to raise your hand electronically or write your questions into the chat room. I welcome both questions and observations from either the presentation or your chatroom discussion. I want to hear what you are thinking and feeling and imagining! Akasha has volunteered to moderate the chat room. I will leave these questions on the screen as we take a 5-minute stretch break. I hope you will continue to stay with our learning community.

Discussion ...

Closing Reading From Ann Baring, The Dream of the Cosmos: A Quest For The Soul:

“To reunite with the ground from which we have come, so assisting the further evolution of Cosmic Consciousness, is one of the most exciting quests that I can imagine. To discover that spirit, so long projected onto a transcendent Creator remote from our world, is the quintessential

consciousness which is awaiting discovery both in nature and in ourselves, is one of the greatest revelations it is possible to experience. The other revelation, no less overwhelming, is that we have the extraordinary responsibility of helping spirit to become conscious in ourselves. It may be that Cosmic Consciousness has waited aeons for us to reach the point where more than a handful of individuals could awaken to this revelation. To respond to what is happening at the deepest level, to enter a new phase of our evolutionary journey, we have to create the vessels to hold the new wine that is now pouring into our culture through the awakening consciousness of many thousands, even millions of individuals. (30)

Blessing: *May we all be worthy vessels for the new wine that is pouring into our culture!*

Release the Council of All Beings: *Thank you for your presence this evening. I say again, may the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight. And now, go if you will, stay if you must, within or without, you remain with us still.*

Blow Out Candle!

End Notes:

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6. Taken from Jim Catano, *Time's Up: It's The End of the World, and We Know It*, Salt Lake City Weekly, September 15, 2021.
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11. Christopher Bache, LSD and the Mind of the Universe: Diamonds From Heaven, (Rochester: Park Street Press), 2019.
12. Ibid., pp. 230 ff.
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24. Bache, Dark Night, p. 231.
25. Macy and Brown, Coming Back To Life, p 21.
26. Their respective websites are as follows: www.riteofpassagejourneys.org and www.sacredgroves.com
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28. The website for the C. G. Jung Society of Seattle can be found at www.jungseattle.net
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