

The Divine Presence in Dreams

Bob Hoss, author *Dream Language*

Just as the imagery in dreams can originate out of various states of consciousness, the appearance of angelic or divine beings in dreams can have many origins. At one extreme, divine beings can appear as part of a true vision or higher state of consciousness achieved in the dream state. At the other extreme the divine being may simply be a metaphor or representation of the dreamer's association with the concept of the divine. Often, the divine being appears as a representation of what Jung³ referred to as the Self, that within our collective unconscious which contains the higher order pattern all we can become, our model of wholeness and connectedness to the universe.

The Divine as a Visionary Presence

"I had been asleep and am not sure if I woke or was still half asleep when I looked at the end of the bed and there stood a glorious angel. He spoke to me but not in words and told me that it was all right, it was not my time yet". That dream occurred to a woman who had been hospitalized for a miscarriage that had gone very badly and the doctors had not expected her to live. She was very concerned that she would have to leave her other two children. After the vision she became calm and recovered more quickly than expected.

Throughout the ages there have been many reports of dreams of a visionary nature that provide guidance, comfort or "truth" from what appears to be a divine presence. Visionary dreams of a divine nature can be so striking that they change a person's life, or the course of history (as evidenced from biblical history). Big visions are not just reserved for the holy masters. The following dream series¹ occurred to a house wife who was simply searching for truth. *"I was being shown a huge brightly lit triangular-shaped sign with lettering in red which said, 'Make yourself a perfect channel and wait, and all things will be given to you'."* Her wait was not long. Shortly thereafter she had the following dream, seemingly explaining the divine order of things: *"I saw a wheel of fire – a strange wheel endlessly turning. Fire - yet not fire - not material fire; electrical forces like the fire seen through closed eyes. The wheel was the Wheel of Time, and hovering above it were souls of all things created; animal, vegetable and man. Much like a computer, programmed to accept each one in its time, each one descended onto the earth only when an opening appeared in the wheel. The vibrations at the opening were attuned to the vibrations of that particular soul. The return from earth happened in a similar manner. Only when the proper opening appeared and the vibrations were right could the soul return from whence it came. There were some who wandered or floated beneath the wheel, unable to return through the fire until the proper opening appeared. And I saw the wheel from above, without wonder, as something I had seen before and recognized."*

Often an angelic or divine presence will appear in dreams as a person goes through spiritual transformation or transcendence. Nigel Hamilton², researched dreams of twenty

persons who went through the process of what he called psycho-spiritual transformation, nineteen of them on spiritual retreats. He observed a dramatic appearance of light, color and visionary imagery in the dreams at the point of transcendence including divine beings and what he called “clear light” (similar to the divine light that is reported from visionary or near death experiences).

Divine Presence as a Metaphor

Most imagery in dreams are visual representations of concepts, emotions and thoughts that are being processed by the sleeping brain. These visual images are presented as metaphors or associations and in some cases represent the appearance of a natural balancing force from the collective Self. Carl Jung³ stated that dreams act on a natural tendency towards balance or wholeness, and generally employ ‘compensation’ as the means to achieve this. Compensation attempts to restore balance by reversing or altering misconceptions that leaves the dreamer stuck in inappropriate behavior patterns. The compensating message is often delivered by a seemingly divine presence or in the form of a surprise or surprising imagery. This is the case in the following dream¹: *“I dreamed that it was the end of the world and Christ was coming in the sky (to my right) in the form of the Holy Trinity. But Christ appeared as a trinity of Santa Clauses, who merged as one and began pouring gifts of love from an urn. They were invisible, but I felt the gifts hit me, so I ran. I tripped, falling down the mountain, with the gifts pouring on me the whole time.”* The dream was indeed related to the dreamer’s spiritual life, but there was an interesting clue in the dream; a “Santa Claus” Christ is not exactly what one might consider a divine presence! The Santa Claus Christ was a down-to-earth metaphor intended to illustrate the dreamers misconceived view of what Christ was all about. The dreamer had an expectation that living a good spiritual life should bring the gift of physical rewards. The dream was compensating for a misconception that, if she were a good girl, God would bring her physical gifts. The dream showed the true gifts to be invisible and intangible gifts of love. Indeed the message was a spiritual one, but the vision of Christ was a metaphor.

Divine Presence as a symbol of the higher SELF

Perhaps the most frequent appearance of divine beings in dreams are what Carl Jung called archetypes.⁴ Archetypes are patterns from within the collective unconscious that guide the human psyche toward a state of wholeness. He indicated that who we are as individuals evolves out of the collective unconscious in cycles of transformation, under the influence of an organizing force he called the Self. He observed that dreams not only reflect this process but act on a natural tendency towards balance or wholeness in order to help bring it about. Jung related human transformation to a symbolic death and rebirth, a death of the existing ego state in order for the new self to emerge or be born.⁴ As you can well imagine, such a death/rebirth cycle would be filled with imagery of a divine spiritual nature.

This process begins when our ego is faced with abandoning some view of self, belief or myth that it is holding on to, that no longer works. The dream may reflect the

abandonment of the old ego as death, fear of death, a loss, being trapped, impending storms, moving into darkness or darkening and descending. Symbolic death is followed by a period of searching for a new self, which can appear as a journey, a search, being lost, underground, or winter. We turn inward to face our shadow self, encounter elements of our instinctual nature, and experience encounters and conflict between opposing sides of self. At some point the natural balancing forces within the psyche appear in order to re-integrate the fragmented self in a way that is more consistent with a higher order sense of Self. The eventual transcendence (integration and acceptance of new parts of self) is accompanied by imagery of release, emergence, celebration and joy. Increases in nature imagery, beauty, light and color are experienced.

The divine presence would typically appear in the form of what Jung referred to as the Anima or Animus, or symbol of the Self. They often reveal themselves as the divine wise old male or female character or angelic beings, the divine child wise beyond their age, the divine masculine or feminine presence or simply the voice or words from a seemingly divine source.⁴ They typically provide a guiding role in dreams.

Such a guiding presence was experienced in the following dream¹: *“I was wandering all over town looking for the book of truth. No one could tell me where it was. Suddenly I saw a divine male presence sitting on the left, who pointed down a descending wooden spiral staircase. He said that truth lies down there. I descended the spiral staircase and found myself in an underground mall, where I proceeded to continue to go from store to store looking for the book. I looked to my left and there was another set of stairs descending from above and on it was a beautiful glowing angelic female. She pointed to a pedestal in front of her which had a golden book on top of it and gave me a knowing glance. I suddenly understood, the book of truth is within myself - not out there in a book somewhere to be purchased.”*

The visionary experience of the angel at the end of the bed, discussed earlier, came at a time of critical physical illness. It seems that guidance from angelic characters in dreams can appear at times of lesser physical problems as well. The following dream was the second of two dreams that provided direct literal messages, seemingly to demand attention to the dietary needs of a man who made a radical change to a vegetarian diet¹: *“I dreamed of a beautiful mystical woman, with a glow emanating from her, sitting on a throne like chair. I was attracted to her and approached her. She looked at me and said ‘bring me tea’. After the first dream with the message ‘eat more fish’ I took this as another dietary demand from my body trying to adjust to the new diet.”*

One of the primary functions of the higher SELF is to bring about integration within the psyche, between the conscious and unconscious. At the core of this is the integration between the ego self and shadow. The shadow according to Jung is an unknown person of the same sex as the dreamer.⁴ The shadow is not always what it sounds like, a dark shadowy frightening character; as the ego moves closer to integration with the shadow it can appear as something beautiful and divine. This is seen in the following dream: *“As I went down the stairs, I saw on my left a large stone archway and a room beyond. On the*

left side of this room was a young woman. As the sunlight streamed in she came forward, and I saw that she was me. She walked toward me and we blended into one person .”

Symbols of the SELF as Related to the Diving Presence in Dreams¹

When the divine presence in a dream originates from the SELF, it might be identified as such by certain clues in the dream; patterns that are representative of integration. Jung stated that the symbols of the SELF come from within the collective unconscious. Based on the observations of Jung⁴, confirmed with hundreds of dreams in my own research¹, the dream elements of an unconscious origin typically appear in the left field of vision, behind or below in dreams, sometimes emerging from darkness. This is in contrast to conscious concepts which typically appear in the right field of vision, ahead or above, that are usually bathed in light. Hoss¹ theorizes that there is also a biological basis for this, having to do with the difference in processing between the left and right brain hemispheres.

Notice that in the visions or visionary dream examples above, the divine imagery appeared in front of the dreamer. The angel appeared at the end of the bed, the triangular sign was in front and above, and the wheel of fire was seen as above and then from above. In contrast to this, that the imagery in the dream examples that were related to the SELF, all appeared to the left of the dreamer. In the “book of truth” dream both the divine male and female presence was to the left of the dreamer. In the dream where the woman integrated with herself, the female figure she integrated with was also located on the left. Note also that the metaphor of the “Santa Claus Christ” was seen as coming from above and to the right, as one might expect of a conscious construct.

Conclusion

The origin of angels or other divine entities in dreams or pseudo dream states, are often difficult to determine from their appearance alone. A case can be made for true visions and visitations from the divine. A case can also be made for these divine entities being symbolic representations in the natural balancing and transformation process taking place in dreams. Perhaps the symbolic clues provided by Jung, in particular as they relate to archetypes of the unconscious, can help distinguish between a divine visitation from without, versus the natural balancing forces of the inner SELF.

REFERENCES

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