

Corona Dreams as a guide or aid through the crisis ...are we dreaming? ...or are we being dreamed?

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For over 20 years, I have been fascinated by the creative work with dreams. As a psychotherapist and Jungian analyst, my work sometimes feels like a simultaneous translation of symbols. And yet, it is not so simple, because every interpretation of our dreams can only be a mere attempt to decipher an unknown text. Ultimately, only the dreamer decides whether they feel touched by the symbolic content, whether they recognize themselves in it, or not. Purely intellectual interpretation of a dream yields little. But connected to the emotional center, to genuine experience, we benefit from the images of our soul and can be guided along inner paths. A standardization of symbols is impossible, since all dream content is ambiguous and dependent on the individuality of the dreamer.

After several weeks of the coronavirus crisis, which unites us worldwide, both the diversity and the apparent increase of similar dream material are striking. It is touching, strengthening, and astonishing to see the creative images that are emerging from the unconscious right now. That we dream significantly more during periods of personal or collective crisis is logically explainable, well-known, and researched. But what are we dreaming about? How should we deal with the often bizarre and drastic content? Are these merely exaggerated or distorted processing of daily events, so-called processing dreams from the personal unconscious, or is there more to them? Why are wheelchairs or bicycles appearing more frequently in the dreams of various people from diverse backgrounds? What could be the message of a hanging nativity scene in the woods, or of a roofless cathedral exposed to the rain? What can we associate with it?

To make the dream content recognizable to the dreamer requires creative and engaging work with the symbolism. From a depth-psychological perspective, similar basic structures can be found in the human psyche, independent of countries and cultures. This means that we humans are also connected to one another through similar or identical symbols. The physician and psychologist C.G. Jung referred to this area as the collective unconscious.

What could bicycles, for example, collectively mean? As a psychotherapist, I discovered that people are fundamentally subject to two different speeds. One that is controlled by consciousness, but also another, controlled by the unconscious, which often remains undiscovered, but nevertheless manifests itself in hidden longings, desires, or even in blockages and fears.

The symbol of the bicycle seems to represent a self-generated speed. In one of these bicycle dreams, a small child threw the dreamer's bicycle against a rock. After first bringing the child to safety by handing it over to a maternal woman, he tried to save his bicycle, which he only managed with difficulty. In the analysis, a shared dialogue, he discovered how much he suffered from being torn from his own rhythm, from his own natural pace. To be blocked, as if by an accident. The dream image depicts this accident. The small child, perhaps we can symbolically associate it with a form of vitality, throws the bicycle against the rock. A possible interpretation of this dream passage could mean that vitality is blocked, has been destroyed by an accident. Doesn't this feeling connect us all in this crisis of stagnation? Doesn't what connects us also connect us, how much effort and strength we put into fighting for our vitality? I also find it remarkable and helpful that the dreamer first entrusts the child—which could be his own vitality—to a protective woman. This means that he first takes care of himself in a maternal sense, in order to then, with all his fighting strength, save his bicycle—his own.

In another bicycle dream, the dreamer is reminded of a deceased friend who used to be in a wheelchair. In the dream, this friend is sitting on a bicycle and “cycling away as fast as he can.”

Does the dreamer, in this case, perceive a form of disability, a blockage in his speed, through the symbol of the wheelchair? Does he, in the dream, delegate his own desire to escape the collective “shutdown” to his formerly paralyzed friend, who consequently tries, as quickly as possible and of his own volition, to escape this collective paralysis?

Generally speaking, as an opportunity presented by this crisis, we could reflect on the extent to which we had adapted to a societal pace before this exceptional situation. At what rhythm, at what speed we are perhaps even doing better now in the crisis, and where we are not. We could consider what we want to retain in the future, or what we would like to change. In other words, what we should pay attention to in the relationship between adaptation and being ourselves.

My further thoughts relate to the mental/spiritual realm in dreams. The Swiss dream researcher C.G. Jung, who traveled extensively in Asia, Africa, and America for the time, discovered that the same basic religious symbols can be found in the human soul, which he summarized under the term “religio”.

The symbol of a hanging nativity scene in the woods, for example: are you, like me, spontaneously reminded of spirituality? Of something inherently religious? For instance, of a sacred space high up in the treetops? Through the image of the nativity scene, the dreamer became aware of how much a particular region, its atmosphere, connected with a special feeling of “having arrived”, meant to her. She recognized this natural place, in the truest sense of the word, as her sacred space. Another dream image refers to a kind of cathedral, open to the sky, expanding into the space of nature. The dreamer was also exposed to rain at this spiritual place. In our conversation, we considered that water is indeed life-giving, because “wherever there is rain or water, it is also about growth or purification.” What a good opportunity such dream images offer us to reflect on the inner paths of growth. I suspect that such symbols draw our attention to reflecting on fundamental human values or on our personal values.

Finally, here is a dream that very impressively shows which inner strengths are revealed to us through dream images:

”I am in my parents’ house, nobody else is there. A tall, middle-aged man, without a recognizable face, is chasing me through the house. The situation feels hopeless; I have the feeling I can’t escape him. But I’m not panicking, I’m very focused and quiet. There are no sounds either; everything happens silently. I don’t hear my heart beating, no whispers or footsteps. It feels as if no doors are needed, as if it’s ‘flowing’. Only shortly before the end of the dream do I manage to escape, seemingly silently, through the balcony door. Then I wake up. Disoriented and agitated.”

The dialogical exploration of the dream triggered a profound self-awareness in the dreamer. She saw in the dream her own peace and strength, and that above all, “quietness” is her most innate strategy for escaping a threat calmly and thoughtfully. A weight lifted from her heart when she said: “I am not wrong, but exactly right as I am!”

With these empowering words, I wish everyone confidence in their dreams, for we need great courage to ultimately rise again as heroes from collective and individual crises. It is certainly worthwhile to enter this “reality behind”, to trust in it, in order to remain alive, and to do so through inner paths.

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