

THE ARMS OF UNKNOWNING:
ILLNESS AS OPPORTUNITY

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My questionnaire below formed an open and introspective frame within which the following presentation was conceived and created:

What has living with cancer changed for you?

What was it like to have what you previously knew as your values and reality regarding life style, family, friends and community thrown into chaos and uncertainty?

In speaking of the “psychoid” archetype, C.G. Jung claims that “the physical and psychic matrix is identical” (Atom and Archetype, *The Pauli/Jung Letters*, pg. 126). If this were true, what kind of “soul message” do you believe may have been inherent in your physical illness?

What has been your anchor through the most painful time of inner turmoil?

What are your greatest fears?

What are your deepest hopes and desires?

Was spirituality an aspect of your daily living prior to your diagnosis of cancer?

Has living with cancer changed your relationship with spirit?

How would you describe the role spirituality plays in your life now?

What are some of the opposites you feel you have been struggling with?

What helps you deal with the tension of those opposites?

What does the word “surrender” trigger in your imagination?

What does “presence” mean to you now?

What do the words “belonging” and “boundaries” mean to you now?

INTRODUCTION

The first time I came face to face with my mortality happened when I was 21 years old. While recovering from surgery at the ICU of a German hospital, the lady in the bed next to me later told me that she was quite sure this ghostly looking girl with tubes coming out of every orifice was going to die. The doctors thought I was awfully young for gall stones, and the kind of inflammatory condition that had nearly shut down all the workings of my entire body. For me, the six-week stay in the hospital felt more like a “vacation” from years of physical and emotional terror in my family, as well as other destructive relationships. Because of complications by hepatitis I was confined to isolation. This meant that I was literally separated from the outer world by a mote, and no one could reach me at this place. The structured nurturing, the time and the inner peace my illness had forced on to me I used to reflect and clarify where I came from, where I was going and what I really wanted to do when I got well.

I had recently graduated as a medical assistant, and wanted to do meaningful work in the field of health and healing. While still in the hospital and hooked up to an IV drip, I applied for apprenticeship with a physician of whom I had heard that he was one of the first in Germany to incorporate acupuncture and Chinese medicine in his general practice. I was accepted and invited to start as soon as I was able. My illness, the introduction into Western Medicine with its advances in curing disease, and my curiosity about Eastern approaches to healing formed the foundation of my lifelong interest in the interconnectedness of body, mind, soul and spirit.

In this presentation, I want to talk about illness as a call from the soul, illness as a personal transformer, illness as opportunity. According to the Bloomsbury Dictionary of Word Origins, “opportunity has its origins in a Latin nautical term denoting ‘favorable winds’. This was *opportunas*, a compound adjective formed from the prefix *ob-* ‘to’ and *portus* ‘harbour’ (source of English ‘port’). It was used originally for winds, ‘blowing towards the harbour, and since it is good when such advantageous winds arrive, it developed metaphorically to ‘coming at a convenient time’...”

One would not expect illness to appear as “coming at a convenient time”, because it rarely ever does, but I would like to shed some light on how illness, insight, and transformation *can* convene, that is come together.

PRESENCE

I will be concentrating my presentation around the story of L whom I first met in one of my dream workshops titled Exploring the Deep Feminine through Creative Dream Work. Some time after the course, L became ill, and then decided that she wanted to continue the dream work with me on a one-on-one basis. Several months into our weekly individual sessions together, I asked L if she would allow me to write about her story. Her response to my question sounded more like an enthusiastic acceptance of an invitation to a feast than a simple consent for permission! “I see my illness now to hold the potential for something to evolve as opposed to just decay or disappearance. I am no

longer a victim. Sharing my story is exciting! Ever since you called, my dreams have been flowing and flowing.....”

Knowing that I was going to write about her opened a well spring of gladness, gratitude and celebration! As much as **L** felt nurtured by my interest in her, **I too** felt grateful and awed by what was transpiring between us. The room was filled with presence and shimmering aliveness that held and beheld both of us, an energy of connectedness that neither of us could have conjured up willingly, and both of us were aware of. It felt like an almost tangible tingling, comparable to the kind you feel when your foot that had “fallen asleep” was “waking up”. That’s what this presence felt like: fully awake. The “you and I” was enlivened with “spirit” as a third entity in the co-created relational field between us. Sandplay therapists Ian Grand and Maria Chiaia coined the term “trans-individual field” (1999) for this phenomenal kind of mutual presence, and the philosopher Ken Wilber describes it like this: “If spirit has any meaning, it must be omnipresent, or all-pervading and all-encompassing. There can’t be a place spirit is not, or it wouldn’t be infinite. Therefore, Spirit has to be completely present, right here, right now, in your own awareness. That is, your own present awareness, precisely as it is, without changing it or altering it in any way, is perfectly and completely permeated by spirit.” (pg. 366)

John O’Donohue too, in his book *Eternal Echoes: Celtic Reflections on our Yearning to Belong*, emphasizes presence as “the whole atmosphere of a person or thing. Presence is more than the way a person walks, looks or speaks. It is more than the shape of a tree or the colour of a stone, yet it is a blend of all these aspects. Presence is mainly the atmosphere of spirit that is behind them all and comes through them.”

Neither **L** nor **I** took for granted this shimmering and awesome sense of presence that was both borne out of and also transcended the limitations of personal and physical boundaries during the process of this project. It has been a great a privilege for me to be allowed into the sacred ground of grief, vulnerability, despair and renewed hope.

HISTORY

L was born four years after World War II had ended. A child of holocaust survivors, she grew up in Israel. “Personal story”, she recalled, “was not allowed. The collective mission of having a home is so demanding. How could I combine consciousness of both a personal and a collective story, and not feel like I was betraying the pain and memory of the grandparents’ suffering? Am I allowed to dis-identify from the Holocaust?” This question has haunted **L** for most of her life.

As if a part of the war was still going on, her parents continued to be single mindedly concerned with surviving throughout her childhood. Having lost everyone in both parents’ families, they were hell-bent on not losing their baby as well. With a will of steel, they fed their little girl, whether she wanted to eat or not. The little girl knew nothing of her parents’ memory of poverty and starvation, and had no way of understanding. Even though she had a roof over her head and a bed to sleep in, she could find no warmth in the arms of her mother. The home environment was cold, stern and

deprived of loving eyes, kind words, nurturance, or any deeper feminine values at all. In an environment barren of love, eating was an ordeal for L. In fact she remembers it as torture. Her mother had force-fed her; she would even force-feed L's vomit back to her, lest anything that cost anything got lost. The price was immeasurable. The tragedies and losses L's parents had survived in the war left the feeling function of their hearts fossilized.

Along with the hard-earned morsels of food, L was being spoon-fed a sense of guilt that was to pervade her years of growing up, into present time. Guilt just for being alive, where being alive meant living on the backs of her ancestors' un-lived lives. L talked to me about this image of debt she carried around in her soul, eternally owing thanks to the soldiers who died so that she could live. She had to prove herself worthy of a life that somehow did not seem to belong to her. In part it was this debt that compelled L toward achieving excellence in everything she did; with the best intentions, it was also her parents' hope and expectation of her. Failing or even mediocrity at anything was unacceptable. Driven toward perfection and success in life, real joy had passed her by. As well, the idea of disease was something that could enter her practice as a healer, but would in her personal life be controlled by proper diet, disciplined exercise, continued education and regular participation in holistic courses.

VERY HUMAN

The diagnosis of stage III ovarian cancer struck her with shock. It went totally against her sense of logic. She had done everything right! How could this happen to her?? L could not deal with being sick. Sickness for her meant failure. Her body had betrayed her, her body had become "garbage". Garbage was something to be thrown out! There was an attitude inside of L that could "throw everyone in the garbage if they weren't perfect." Not unlike a troubled auto-immune system that is no longer able to defend the body against invasive growth and instead attacks its own healthy cells, her dismissal of anything flawed got the proverbial baby all mixed up with the bathwater: *both* were at danger at being sent down the drain!

L was visibly moved when it became clear to her that I for one did not share that belief. Could it be that her body had actually served her well until then, and furthermore could be treasured rather than viewed as garbage? This questioning and revision of attitude toward her body was the first turn of direction along L's journey through cancer. Even though anguish, anxiety and fear of death were "killing" her, there were people who did not see a flawed body as garbage. As her picture of perfection was beginning to collapse, something else started to grow out of the rubble: a process of opening up toward a very *human woman* inside of herself.

In his book "What Dying People Want", David Kuhl says that "as much as the diagnosis of a terminal illness marks the end, it also serves as a beginning – an opportunity to ask what the time remaining in your life means to you". (pg. 4) "Perhaps it is the anxiety at the core of all anxiety that is the anxiety of not living the life we would truly like to live.

Certainly it contributes to death anxiety. In that sense it would seem that death anxiety is related to life anxiety.” (pg. 18)

And, Ken Wilber’s wife Treya shared in her cancer journal, published in his book “Grace And Grit” (pg. 211): “Just living is OK! Being is OK, doing isn’t necessarily necessary. It’s a kind of allowing. Of letting go of this society’s overly masculine and hyper-doing values. To work on the whole issue of woman’s spirituality, the feminine faces of God. To settle down, to till the soil in one place and see what will grow there.” In his own account of his wife’s process through her illness, Ken Wilber observed that a profound change involved her relationship between being and doing. “Treya had always been in touch with the doing side of herself; the first [shift] was a rediscovery of the being side of herself – the feminine, the body, the Earth, the artist...” (pg. 335)

While L let friends and relatives do the “research” around cancer, treatment modalities and statistics, she entered a period of what Jungian analyst James Hillman might call “insearch”, i.e. an inward-bound search for “significance below what seems merely evident and natural” (James Hillman, pg. 29).

During excruciating weeks of chemotherapy following the surgery, L was juggling resignation, suicidal imaginings, terror and fear of annihilation on one hand, and the will to live on the other. If she was going to live, was there something in her that **had** to die, and what was it? What did being alive *mean* now? L vowed that if she was going to survive cancer she would want to “become a better person.” She wanted to go to the ‘underground’ by which she meant hospitals and hospices which she saw as harbors of darkness and despair, places she had until then always avoided. “I want to take the opportunity to see the underside of being human” she said. “Not in my office, through words, but really BE there, feel it and taste it. I want to breathe in the quality of the environment that is working to keep me alive as opposed to seeing the hospital as a terrible place.” Adopting as best as she could a compassionate rather than critical attitude, the pre-surgery hours which she had anticipated to be unbearable became meditative, even relaxing.

SEEDS OF FAITH

In the weeks that ensued, L expressed grief in our sessions about loneliness, and about recognizing how she was used to making projects rather than relationships her priority. In a way, true aliveness had been missing from her life. One of the most urgent questions that arose for L through her illness had to do with survival of the soul, belonging, and the meaning of spirit. The realization of her mortality brought on despair. Despair was eventually outshone by glimmers of hope around the continuity of the soul, beyond the incarnate existence of the ego. The prospect of life in the visible world being all there *was* to life was unbearable. There **had** to be something else, a purpose that gave enduring value to our existence here, an “entry point for the soul after the body is dead and disintegrated.” Carl Jung suggests that “...if we can reconcile ourselves to the mysterious

truth that the spirit is the life of the body seen from within, and the body is the outward manifestation of the life of the spirit – the two being really one – then we can understand why the striving to transcend the present level of consciousness must give the body its due.” (CW 10, The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man). Could it be that the visible and the invisible worlds were not as separate from each other as L feared? This among many questions was simmering in the cauldron of our work together.

Inevitable dependency on others propelled L out of her loneliness; longing for human connectedness became the source of a raw kind of vulnerability L had never known before, or at least not allowed herself. Some days she spent up to 16 hours a day on the phone, as if to make up for lost time! A huge shift was happening in her relationships, both to the outer as well as her inner world. These hours spent talking with others generated strength and trust, and attending to the archetypal energy in her dreams and journals became an anchor while storms were tossing her boat in the dark night of her soul.

A friend of L’s who is a psychic, suggested that beyond our incarnate existence, each person had what he called a “mother soul” that is constantly guiding as, such as in dreams and through intuition. The image of her soul as a permanent “mother” symbol guiding her way through this melting pot of emotions gave her comfort.

PARADOX

Recalling Jungian Analyst Marion Woodman’s quote “blossoms bloom in the fire”, L compared her illness to a crucible. Within the crucible, the heat had to be high enough for transformation to happen, yet not so high as to crack the vessel, or cause a complete breakdown. As obsessed as L had been with doing anything in her control to uphold the image of a perfect body, cancer confronted her with the choice to either burn or blossom in the fire of her emotions. The outcome of surgery, possible side effects of Chemotherapy and the tube inserted in her body, as well as radiation and how her body would respond to the interventions were out of her control. She had been in the army when she was younger, though never in battle. Without shield and unarmed, she was now in battle. A battle of opposing forces, this battle of Life and Death threatened to tear her apart. Unable to sleep, unable to be alone, unable to foresee what would happen to her, unable even to read or write for a while, she was too exhausted to fight, and too scared not to fight. She did not want to take any sleeping medication for fear of not waking up. Utterly exhausted, she finally caved in and accepted some sleeping aid. She surprised herself: it was ok to let go and give up on constant vigilance! Along with accepting a brief course of sleeping pills, a gift from a friend was particularly helpful: a large journal that had no lines. L took the journal as an invitation. Before going to bed, she would write in her journal - in big letters - **“let go of ego, open up to something bigger, surrender...”**

She felt that she had no choice but to hold the tremendous tension between life and death, and at the same time try to go inside to a positive place where she could let herself fall into a state of Being. A place of quiet refuge, where there was no doing to be done. As the psalmist wrote, “be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46) Playing, doodling in

her journal, dancing or just moving around - not to conform to any external structure, but let her body express her feelings spontaneously - became part of a process of surrender and blossoming for L. Perhaps it was this sense of Being that emerged as the “third” (or “transcendent function”) from the two opposing forces of *either* life *or* death, of *either* achieving *or* failing, thus unifying *either/or* into *both/and*.

“Most of us have forgotten how to play”, says Marion Woodman in “Coming Home to Myself, have “forgotten the joy of creativity. Without joy, we run from pain. Without creativity, we run from emptiness. The faster we run, the more severe our addictions. We cannot face our nothingness, the ultimate anguish of living a life knowing who we are not, not knowing who we are.”

Allowing her heart to lead the way with unbounded spirit, L began to bring the pages of her journal to life with color, strokes and lines that mirrored a new freedom and release from perfectionist restrictions! Paradoxically, moving beyond her usual self critical restrictions led to a greater acceptance of real human fallibility and limitations, such as those of her surgeons. All of a sudden, L could reconcile herself to the possibility that even surgeons might make mistakes. If that should happen, “I’ve had 57 good years”, she concluded. She no longer felt like a victim, but rather empowered with a new sense of grace and dignity.

L later recalled being able to sleep again as one of various turning points on her journey. Her body had been much more resilient than she had ever trusted it to be. She was surprised to wake up in the morning after falling asleep at night, and found that the whole ordeal wasn’t actually too horrible! A seed of Faith had dropped into the ground of her soul! “Faith that maybe something, somewhere is supporting me”, she said. “Things did not become a flood of disasters; I’m not totally deserted by God; I have not been thrown out of the Universe”! Faith had been something L had thought about before, but had wanted more “proof” of, or some sort of guarantee. Cancer and despair had accelerated her faith making process! Marion Woodman, a cancer survivor herself, writes about the paradox of an eternal being that dwells in a temporal body, and the suffering we undergo in the process of what she calls ‘soulmaking’. In her words, “soulmaking is allowing eternal essence to live and experience the outer world through all the senses - seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, touching – so that soul grows during its time on earth.” The soul learns by heart. When the ego holds on for dear life to what it has known and built as its security, and the heart says ‘let go’, letting go and calling on a higher power can seem like a leap into an abyss.

SURRENDER

L had been so scared of being ‘needy’. Allowing herself to need other people, and to admit a longing for a higher power, for God, felt like a colossal shift. Cancer had helped loosen the rigid lining of her ego structure and defenses. Neediness was not a death sentence after all! A whole new appreciation of love began to replace her former irritability and quickness to criticize. Melting created warmth, vulnerability more tenderness, and receptivity a new set of values in her heart and soul which was reflected

in her dreams. “Maybe we are not insignificant”, she thought out loud, “maybe we ARE a significant part of the Universe.” Reflecting on Carl Jung’s ideas of individuation as one’s life goal, L wondered “what’s the point”? “However”, she went on, “if it’s all part of a bigger picture, then it’s ok.”

Opening herself to love and faith, L consciously gave up trying to figure out and understand everything with her head. Bringing more presence to her feelings and what was going on in her body, she became aware of how noisy her mind had been. She asked herself: “Do you need to KNOW what happens after life, after death, after cancer, after chemotherapy?” “No”! “Just one moment at a time”, she reminded herself. The if-only’s and what-if’s of her mind chatter that had been torturing her gave way to moments of deeper quiet and conscious breathing, to taking in life as she never had before, and to being more at ease with not-knowing. She could no longer afford to imagine herself in a fantasized future with things to excel in for appreciation. The future held no certainty. “With cancer, my existence in looking *forward* was gone. I had no choice; I was thrown into living in the present moment.” L was particularly aware of acute presence when sitting with clients. “I know that we really *don’t* know what’s going to happen in the next moment.” Not taking anything for granted any longer revealed a preciousness of life to L that helped her see everything as *good just as it was*. Remembering difficult moments without being swallowed up by them let her *appreciate* the ability to walk, eat and share in the condition of being human. L identified what was happening inside of herself as the birth of “feminine process”, and dropping into “Being here Now”. Flashbacks threw open flood gates of tears through which she felt unspeakably sorry for herself. It was sad, she said, that it took something as horrible as cancer to appreciate the simplest things in life. At the same time she was able to embrace even her sadness. “If it hadn’t been for the pain and the sorrow, I wouldn’t know the new me who sees things differently now”, she exclaimed, with passion.

“Thy will be done” became L’s daily meditation. Rainer M. Rilke expressed what L experienced as surrender to a Higher Power in his Book of Hours: Love Letters to God, like this:

You are the deep innerness of all things
The last word that can never be spoken.
To each of us you reveal yourself differently,
To the ship as coast line, to the shore as ship. (Book of Pilgrimage, II, 22)

L decided not to let fear run her life any longer, but instead to try and learn from her illness what she could learn. Quoting Rilke again, he mused that

This is what things can teach us:
To fall, patiently to trust our heaviness.
Even a bird has to do that
before he can fly. (Book of Pilgrimage, II, 16)

A new tone of liveliness shone in L's voice when she spoke of her deepening faith. "The Universe cares for us; all I can do is do my best" she confessed. Discernment in making decisions such as buying food was important, but then "let the stomach digest – I know nothing about it". To allow and even welcome not-knowing meant *surrendering* to God's mysterious and unknowable ways, even if that included pain. "I have done all kinds of inner work", L said. "Now it's time to taste it, to BE vulnerable, to BE on the side I never dared look at, only talk about."

CONNECTING

L has been enjoying her creativity more than ever before. There was no running or doing to do; just going within and BE there. To drop into a state of Being, through painting or dancing helped her for the first time to really feel true PLEASURE. L was amazed at how everything she needed was given in this inner place of surrender. People showed up at the right time with the right kind of support. Some left again, in which case L worked through her feelings of abandonment on one side, and trust that what was happening was right on the other. One woman friend who had been very helpful for a good stretch of time suddenly announced that she had enough, because L persisted in her need to talk about death. So she did not come back, and it was ok. L knew she needed to talk about death until she felt she had come out the other side. If she was going to die she wanted to die gracefully, not avoiding but attending to her process. Talking about death helped her being birthed deeper into her aliveness and connectedness. As Ken Wilber's wife Treya said in her cancer journal: "Because I can no longer ignore death, I pay more attention to life."

A deep and steadily developing sense of inner gratitude and pleasure took L by surprise. While she had engaged in various creative venues for a long time, the experience of pleasure had been absent from most of her life. In part she attributed this new sensation to all the love, nurturing and tenderness that had been offered to her from many sides, including the volunteers at the hospital and at Wellspring (a support centre for people with cancer). Receiving love had been her lesson, accepting it the price! In the poet's words: "A condition of complete simplicity, costing no less than everything" -- T.S. Eliot's powerful imagery from his Four Quartets!

In one of L's recent dreams (21/10/2006) L and another woman by the name of Jasmine were in the process of giving birth. They were in a big, beautiful building. A mature husband and a wife were helping them. There were also some students in the building, and through the window there was a view of beautiful trees and open sky. L wanted many photos to be able to show her child the beauty she was born with....

L no longer felt that cancer had diminished her worth, and found delight in forming connections with other women, other survivors. What mattered was to *feel* her life, not to fill it with things. For her, love was transforming the terror of the unknown and the fear of emptiness. A gradual relinquishing of ego control allowed elements of spontaneity and pleasure into her heart. "I was shattered by the holocaust. Like vomit sitting in my throat

I could neither keep nor get rid of it. The trauma had got stuck in my body. I cannot recover love from that trauma, but cancer feels like another form of holocaust, a personal holocaust that *can* heal, which I *can* recover love from.” Love is so alive in her that the question of *meaning* doesn’t even exist any longer. “Love and goodness now hold the answers to my questions of meaning and belonging” L says, concluding one of our concentrated conversations.

In the myth of Psyche and Amor, his wound and Psyche’s perseverance on the path of re-connecting with her beloved result in their sacred marriage. Out of this union, Psyche gives birth to a daughter, called Pleasure. According to Erich Neumann’s commentary on the tale, the birth of Pleasure “bears witness to the activity of Eros”. “The highest form of this birth”, he writes, “is self-birth in the rebirth of the initiate as a divine being”. (pg. 159) In other words, *conscious* suffering and a loving relationship with body, soul and Spirit or one’s sense of a Higher Self can infuse us with a deep experience of joy and aliveness, independent of and beyond age and life expectancy.

In this context, here is another excerpt of T.S. Eliot, from his Four Quartets (East Coker):

Love is most nearly itself
When here and now cease to matter.
.....
Here or there does not matter.
We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion ...

BREAD OF THE EARTH

Sharp, sharp is the sword,
Sharp, sharp is the sword,
When the moon is very small
It takes the shape of a sickle.

My sickle will not stop
Until the evening,
We will be harvesting
The golden shibolim.

This is L’s translation of an Israeli song for Shavuot which a group of women were singing in L’s dream at the beginning of December, about one and a half years into dealing with her illness and healing process. In the dream, “they are going through the whole song; it’s a long one, in Hebrew. No one is stopping it, no one interrupts the song. The sensation is of pure pleasure, a FEELING state, with joy coming through. I feel like I take up space with who I am and what I love”, L says, “I don’t have to blend my

uniqueness.” Shortly afterwards, another song is playing, again with no pause or interruption.

Shibolim,, shibolim, shibolim,
Piles of shibolim....
We will bring it to the barn,
We will collect it....

“I am reaping the result of my work and process”, L says, “with more process to come. Bread will be made, the bread of the earth.”

The dream goes on as follows:

“I live with my (ex)husband and 2 sons, no daughter. I want to go to Romy’s class (aerobics, Romy trained with Jane Fonda, loved the class in Israel). I haven’t attended for a while and wonder if it’s still on. It’s supper time: can my son and husband make dinner? I ask my son what he wants to eat, but don’t even know what’s in the fridge. As I walk, I pass by my younger son’s home. His house looks like a kiosk. My husband says it looks so tidy. Yes, from the outside it does, but there is no food here! There are books, candles and match boxes. It’s dark inside; I want to ask him for some matches. It’s safe from thieves in the dark; they wouldn’t be able to see how tidy it is.” End of dream -

In all its glory, I also heard a warning against overreach in L’s dream. As happy as she was about reconnecting with her roots through the song at a time when she felt her physical health returning to her, L also knew that she had to be careful not to fall back into old patterns of doing too much. As teacher and author Margot Silk Forrest reminds us, “The dark night of the soul ends in rebirth. It does not end simply in a return to the status quo. This is a spiritual truth about the soul’s journey, and it is a great consolation during the dark times.”

As well, I wondered whether the dream wanted to signal caution about our work together. Was there a bit of a danger that L might compromise her feminine process in order to fit perfectly into my “project”? We discussed whether and if so, *how* she might unconsciously be performing, bending or over-extending herself to intuit my expectations of her, or rather her perceptions of my expectations. Through exploring, we discovered that the dream was a warning against signing up for too many workshops, lectures and projects now that she had re-gathered her plentiful energy. The dream seemed to point out an over-emphasis on masculine activity (sharp blades, collecting, day-work, working out, ideal body, sons, ex-husband, books, perfect order, a small moon, no daughter, empty fridge, and no food).

BODYSOUL

On Christmas Eve day, L called me with a gift. For the first time in her life she was celebrating Christmas! She and a woman friend of hers were going to share a little feast of a meal and exchange gifts! She laughed when she told me – “what a paradox” she said, “I, a Jew, and she, a Hindu, are going to have Christmas together! Isn’t it wonderful? We are going to celebrate!” Being alive *was* something to celebrate! The gift she had for me was a dream. “I had a healing dream for you”, she said, “I had it the night after we last spoke.” (23.12.’06)

Here is L’s dream: “I or someone else is in a box, like a house. It is a rectangle, extending on the point. As the person moves, the house moves. They don’t move IN, but WITH the house, there is no separation.”

The house and the person are one. Body and soul are one! In “The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche” Jung claims that “since psyche and matter are contained in one and the same world, and moreover are in continuous contact with one another and ultimately rest on irreprehensible, transcendent factors, it is not only possible but fairly probable, even, that psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing.” (CW 8)

Back to the dream: “Then I am at Ursula’s house (home) with a group. There is a movie projected on the wall. The picture comes to life: Ursula is a young girl and is dancing in a white too-too (skirt) and a sleeveless shirt. She has black hair. She is also sick; I know it. She is holding a stethoscope in her hand. I come closer and want to know what she has, what she is sick with. She seems ok now. (Am I looking for vulnerability?) Then I remember another picture on the wall. Now it’s Ursula as a child. I just see her face and loose hair. I’m surprised she exposes herself like that. She is modeling love for the child self. It is clear; there is no hiding, no fear, nor arrogance. She is open and truthful, both in the photograph and the message that comes across: I AM WHO I AM.

Then there are more pictures: 3 young black people, puckering their lips. They look like pigs. The picture is the kind that has a little gap between the images...a style of painting. There is one more photograph of pink flowers, also with a gap between the two images. We move to Ursula’s office space which is in a different location. We get tickets, but don’t need them, because we come as a group. A young man speaks to another Hungarian man at the desk [L’s grandmother had been from Hungary!]. With the help of the Hungarian speaking man we get in. I understand the language, but am too shy to add something in Hungarian. A man walks in from the left side. Water is coming out of the wall. A man steps into the puddle. It’s clear and clean. We need to tell Ursula the water problem is not quite fixed yet.

L felt elated by her dream. She loved it and saw it as a healing dream that didn’t beg for much interpretation. She understood the water as emotion – clear, open and exposed. “More emotion will come”, she said. “But now it isn’t muddied by the past of previous generations. Coming from a strict, critical and demanding background has brought a lot of shame. Even the God of the Old Testament was so punitive. I was never good enough, and could never be vulnerable because that would make me ugly. Now I feel whole.” Jung writes about the child archetype that “Life is flux, a flowing into the future, and not

a stoppage or a backwash. It is, therefore, not surprising that so many of the mythological saviours are child gods. This agrees exactly with our experience of the psychology of the individual, which shows that the “child” paves the way for a future change in personality. In the individuation process, it anticipates the figure that comes from the synthesis of consciousness and unconscious elements in the personality. It is, therefore, a symbol which unites the opposites, a mediator, bringer of healing, that is, one who makes whole.” (CW 9, *The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*) L saw the white dress in the dream as a wedding dress, signifying a union between masculine and feminine, between dark and light. Since it is a child, in fact the therapist as a child, wearing the white dance outfit, the dream appears to point toward growth, potential, and the process of integration. The stethoscope may well have shown up as a symbol of listening to the heart, listening to breath, to the depth of taking in life. While L’s story and the story of her people bear the wounds of separation, the dream also shows that body and soul are no longer separate from one another. The dreamer and her dwelling place are one; when one moves, the other moves also; when one rests, the other rests.

PROCESS AND INTEGRATION

In the Foreword to her book *BONE, A JOURNAL OF WISDOM, STRENGTH AND HEALING*, Marion Woodman made the daring statement, that cancer for her was “the gift of Now, a sense of all time precariously lodged within it. Living with death is a more abundant life.” She goes on to say that “fate is the death we owe to Nature. Destiny is the life we owe to soul.”

For L, illness has been a blessing in disguise. She was able to let cancer change her in such a way as to rip away what she had previously known as her safety net. The ultimate transforming agent was Love. We will never know whether (or when) she would have been open to experiencing Love and faith at that level of depth had it not been for the illness. We do know that her heart had been cracked open.

To a large part, the transformation that has been taking place has grown from the gift of connecting with people who care and who put their heart into it personally. “A dream sent to me and to you, to both of us”, L beamed. “By your interest in me you have led me to my centre of vulnerability and helplessness, and to the gem in it. With your belief in illness as opportunity you have helped me put together vulnerability and beauty.”

Her cancer has been in remission. Continuing a conscious effort to make time for quiet descending to the heart will help L along her healing journey. As they have in the past, her dreams will remind her in case the old “doing drive” kicks into auto-pilot. Integrating stillness and receptivity with activity and creativity, and every now and then surrendering the need to know into the arms of unknowing – are all part of the dance. And, to quote T.S. Eliot once more: *Except for the point, the still point, there would be no dance, and there is only the dance.*

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