

May 24, 2020
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The Collective Unconscious



Ezekiel 1: 4-9

As I looked, a stormy wind came out of the north: a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber. In the middle of it was something like four living creatures. This was their appearance: they were of human form. Each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces without turning as they moved.

May we hear what the Dream Giver says to us today.

So far in this dream series, we have looked mostly at dreams from our personal unconscious. In this passage from the 7th century BCE, Ezekiel's dream gives us a glimpse of a vision coming out of what Carl Jung calls the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is deeper than our personal unconscious. In our dreams that come out of our own unconscious, we know the people and recognize common objects. Unlocking our dreams is connecting the images we recognize with something from our life experience that is buried just beneath our awareness. However, when we dive deeper and there are figures in our dreams that are part animal, part human, or anything not 'real' in our waking life, we know we have dipped into the well of the collective unconscious.

The collective unconscious is the knowledge and imagery that is shared by all human beings. It's not our personal memories; it is our inherited instincts and the collective wisdom printed into the genetics of our species. These aren't symbols made out of our particular life experience, but out of the human experience of thousands of years. These are universal deep-seated beliefs and instincts about things like reproduction, life and death survival instincts and spirituality. Jung proposed that the commonalities that are found in major world religions are the result of this shared pool of unconsciousness.

As much as our unconscious dreams are filled with symbol and metaphor, dreams from the collective are all the more so. Metaphor, symbol, archetypes create images that go beyond our imagining. That's how we recognize when a dream is from the collective instead of the personal unconscious- really weird creatures, universal archetypes appear. Artists have tried to capture these descriptions we find in Ezekiel. In Ezekiel's visions a great wind, great cloud, fire flashings are universal God images of energy forces. Four living creatures which are human but each have four faces and four wings, with feet like a cow, human hands under their wings, and they move. The dream goes on into greater detail about how the man's face also has a face of a lion, ox, and eagle, and then wheels intersecting wheels. The rims of wheels are filled with eye, and the whole thing is in motion.

Most of us might wake up from a dream like that and go, what the heck! Where did that come from? Did I watch some sci-fi last night? Was there something wrong with those mushrooms on the pizza? That's a dream from the collective unconscious.

Ezekiel's dream appeared to a 7th century BCE prophet in a time of international upheaval. Empires are crumbling- gobbling each other up. The Babylonian Empire ate the Assyrian empire which ate the Israelites. The Israelites have been conquered. Their holy temple destroyed. The holy seat of God - where they believed they encountered the divine was in rubble, and they had been chained and marched miles and miles into a foreign land. They no longer live in the land their God promised them as a blessing. They no longer worship in the sacred temple where God met them. They are living in exile. They think God is back there in the Holy of Holies of the Temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel taps into a message spun into the collective unconscious for all people. This wheel image of fire flashing, moving, seeing icon shows that God is not limited to the Temple in Jerusalem. God is not fixed in an ark of the covenant worshipped in the golden temple made of human hands. The dream shows that God is powerful force of energy that moves! God has wheels! - moves in any and all directions -with all , seeing all, being all. Ezekiel's dream says, The Divine presence can be experienced anywhere and at anytime. Ezekiel learns this presence of God with us , within us, we are part of this energy of God - human and divine complexity. John-the-Baptizer and Jesus of Nazareth knew it too, also the apostle Paul. Mystics and ordinary folks who have found union with God in whom we live and move and have our being. Our faith ancestors tapped into this collective wisdom. God is out of the box and moving with us.

Friends, we are in exile- at least it feels as if we are. We are exiled out of our sanctuary where for some gazing through the sainted glass windows or being carried on the bellows of the organ is a thin place of prayer and worship. Where for some, seeing faces of friends (3-D), watching children wiggle and question and laugh and sing in worship is worship. Where sharing coffee, catching up with friends, singing in the choir are thin places of holy wonder. All of which are gone from us right now. When will we gather - all together? - when will we shake hands and give needed hugs ? When will our choir fill the rafters with heavenly praise? We do not know.

As wonderful as all those experiences are in giving us glimpses of God's, the sacred, the Holy Divine, we must remember God has wheels! God moves in all directions and in all places ... so our living room sofas , kitchen tables , all become sacred spaces of worship where God dwells -on Sunday morning and all through the week, as work and play and meals take place in the very place where worship happens, God is present.

The gift in all of this, is recognizing, that all those spaces are sacred. All we do in those spaces can be prayer and worship. As we work and as we play, as we eat and as we rest, God is there with us always.

May we live each day with God of wheels and eyes and all the faces of Christ bringing comfort, bringing love into the world. Amen.