

Meredith Sabini

# THE FIELD OF DREAMS



## Dreams of the Earth

Are we dreaming about our home planet, Earth, at this period known as the Great Turning? I have had such dreams and know that others have as well. To get a glimpse of how our dreaming mind is portraying the current global situation, I looked over three years of transcripts from monthly sessions of Culture Dreaming that Richard Russo and I have held at the Dream Institute in Berkeley. Culture Dreaming is a unique process where individual dreams string together into a new co-created narrative that is then linked to societal and suprapersonal issues. I found many dreams that referred directly to the earth and to the death-and-renewal cycle that is under way.

Some dreams contained predictable motifs such as flooding due to melting ice caps, bridges fallen after earthquakes, and the devastation in war zones. But the dreaming also shows our living through this transitional period with surprising resolve and clarity of purpose. I've chosen representative dreams to present here.

*"I need a map," one person says. "I don't have one," comes the reply.*

This dream captures the pervasive sense of wanting to know where we're headed, yet there being no map readily at

hand. This next dream continues the theme:

*I'm in a library, and unroll an old parchment map to show a friend the way. The map suddenly becomes the countryside itself!*

This suggests that the way could be found by consulting historical sources for objective information, perhaps about other times of major upheaval and transition. We know, for instance, that the same symptoms of decline and fall Rome exhibited are present today.

*There's a big gash in the earth, very troubling. I try to cover it with palm fronds.*

"Gash" describes a bodily injury inflicted to the surface that can go deep enough to be life-threatening—like the injuries now inflicted upon our soil and water systems, upon tribal cultures and many animal species. Are the palm fronds merely an attractive cover-up of the magnitude of the problem? Or might they hint at rites of renewal, in their association with Easter and Spring? They are also the natural materials out of which shelters are constructed in many parts of the world.

*I'm with others in a clearing in the forest. We've gathered because a holocaust is going to happen. Black stuff starts pouring down from the sky.*

*Someone says we ought to run and get indoors. I say I just want to experience this. I hold out my hand. The black stuff is soft and spongy, like decaying organic matter.*

There is a pervasive fear that some ominous event is coming. This dream shows both the impulse to run and hide, in the fantasied hope of being safe and untouched, and the willingness to stay and bear witness. The dreamer's choice typifies the kind of bold determination and moral integrity that I have been noticing in recent dreams: as a participant-observer, he lets the ominous material touch him. What falls from the sky seems awful at first, but on closer look is perhaps merely decaying organic matter. This symbol points to the composting process that takes place during a cycle of death-and-renewal. The dominant paradigm has held that matter is inert and inactive, but the new physics indicates this is inaccurate. "Dark matter" could also refer to the potent, enfolded dimensions of life that are beyond our perceptual range.

The next dream expresses the perennial question of how we are to relate to nature:

*I'm in a beautiful garden with a waterfall. I reach out and touch the water. The garden disappears! This is fascinating. I experiment*

*with it: I touch the water and the garden again disappears; then I take my hand away and the garden reappears. I decide I'll leave the water alone.*

As our ancestors in previous centuries explored the globe and made discoveries about the earth's diversity, their main intent was to appropriate natural resources, cultural artifacts, and even human populations. The impulse to control the manifest world is portrayed in this dream by the temptation to touch the waterfall. The consequence is that nature's garden disappears. A contemporary illustration of this is the terrible dying off of the bees: transporting them from orchard to orchard, state to state, disrupts their sensitive equilibrium, leaving them susceptible to diseases. The dream shows how to remedy impairments to natural habitats and systems caused by human intervention: take away our hand, and the Garden will restore itself.

*We're on a hillside where plants in row after row of orchard or vineyard have all died. They were grown according to the wrong principle—too much linear order. On another part of the hillside, people are now planting in a new mode—*

continued on page 30

## Field of Dreams—

continued from page 29

*in clusters according to meaning. This will succeed, because it's in accord with natural laws.*

Chaos and order are two complementary, basic principles of nature; if either one dominates the other, the manifest world gets out of balance. Too much linearity does not support growth of any kind. A new way of tending life is already at work, based on natural laws of emergence, synchronicity, and resonance. The old and the new ways are present simultaneously; this corresponds to the fact that we are living in the interstices between two contrasting paradigms or *Weltanschauungs*.

*I'm in a forest. I can't tell how big it is. There are ribbons and mirrors on the trees. I remember a line from Rumi: "Is the One I love everywhere?"*

This dream echoes a response to the opening question of where are we, are we lost? The dream seems to say, Just because you can't see the

whole forest for the trees, doesn't mean you are lost; it means you are inside something that is bigger than yourself, bigger than you can grasp. Marie-Louis von Franz, in her wonderful books on fairy tales, notes that the main character is often lost in a forest and has to ask humbly for aid from the animals or the disenfranchised who live there. She considers the forest a universal symbol for the great unknown, the darkness or creative chaos out of which something new emerges.

What of the ribbons and mirrors? We put ribbons on our hats or hair and on children going to parties; they are associated with celebration, gaiety, vitality, joy. Many folk cultures decorate their animals with colorful ribbons, paint, and ornaments, such as the plaited manes of native American horses or the elaborately decorated cows in India. Mirrors signify a capacity for reflection, considered a unique quality of human consciousness.

Nature has been reflecting back to us the face we have shown it: that of the conqueror, the hunter, the con-

sumer. We've violated nature's laws by producing too many offspring, using too many resources, and dumping our waste carelessly. We behave as if nature is an all-giving mother and we her needy children. We clear-cut forests and then hide the evidence behind a thin row of trees along major highways, the way a young child might try to hide the evidence of having eaten half the cookies for a party.

What if we treated nature as the Guest and turned toward it a face of appreciation and respect? What if we spent less time and money on overly orderly solutions, and decorated our trees, our waterways, our mountains as if they were the temples we lived in? The dream poses the koan, Is the one I love everywhere? The answer implied is Yes, it *is* everywhere. It is in *all* living forms. The mystery and devotion in this dream do not imply a simplistic identification with nature, but a mature and mutual relationship.

The dreams I've recounted here would certainly have personal meaning to the individuals who had them, and could

be interpreted using that lens. The Culture Dreaming approach lets us look at ordinary dreams through a broader lens. During times of crisis and transition, dreams that are manifestly about the world around us tend to increase in frequency. The dreams you've just read, plus others, were made into a dramatic performance that was presented to the public on Earth Day.

The reason for turning to dreams for information and guidance on sociocultural matters is that the dreaming mind has a considerably wider bandwidth than that of the conscious mind. It may be that our species has been unable to solve some chronic local and global problems because we've been drawing from a limited range of our human capacities. As I think the dreams here illustrate, the dreaming mind is cognizant of the dire situation our earth is in, and portrays various aspects of it with elegant simplicity. Dreams may contain solutions we haven't considered. Would we not be wise to invite the dreaming mind to our discussions?