



"Dance of the Dissident Daughter"

Recently I came across an extraordinary series of dreams, related by Sue Monk Kidd in her spiritual memoir, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*.

Kidd is the bestselling author of *The Secret Life of Bees*, a wonderful novel set in South Carolina in the sixties, about a fourteen year old white girl who runs away from home in search of her mother, and is taken in by three middle-aged black sisters who keep bees and produce "Black Madonna Honey." In addition to mother-daughter relationships and racial conflict, the book also explores the true meaning of spirituality. Beautifully written, gentle and wise, it's a terrific book; if you haven't read it, you have a wonderful treat in store for you!

Kidd was raised as a Southern Baptist and later studied the Christian mystic and contemplative literature. Before she published *Secret Life of Bees* in 2002, she was known primarily as a "Christian writer" who wrote inspirational books and articles about spiritual issues from a traditional perspective. Then, when she was thirty-eight, she "woke" from a "deep sleep" and realized that all her life she'd been striving to be a good Christian woman within a tradition that had been shaped and dominated by men. Thus began a spiritual journey that was to transform her life, her spiritual beliefs, and her writing career.

The turning point was a dream:

Sitting on the sand at the edge of the ocean, I am

amazed to see that I am nine months pregnant and beginning labor. I look around for help but am on an island by myself. Well, I'll just have to deliver the baby myself. As the labor begins I rub my abdomen . . . the pain comes and goes, sometimes I cry . . . finally I start to push and give birth to a healthy baby girl. I hold her up, laughing with joy. I bring her close and look into her eyes. I'm shocked to see that I've given birth to myself, that I am the baby and the mother both.

Over the years I've heard many dreams in which someone is pregnant, or a baby is born, and it's usually fruitful to discuss these images in terms of some new aspect of the dreamer's self that is being born—but I've never heard a birth dream that so clearly stated its theme before. The dream was so vivid that when Kidd awoke, she was momentarily disoriented; she'd been in labor and given birth, and expected to find a baby beside her in the bed!

The dream left her with a sense of restless anticipation. Who would the baby girl grow up to be? In her journal she wrote, "The dream was a mystery . . . but I knew clearly that it was about my life as a woman." Thus began her quest to find her own spiritual truth, a journey marked at each stage by dreams.

Sometimes the dreams offered clear messages. Feeling uneasy after signing a new contract with a Christian magazine to continue writing traditional inspirational articles, she dreamed:

I come upon a group of people gathered around a coffin. I wonder who died and move closer to look. . . . The person in the coffin is me. I'm holding a copy of the inspirational magazine with which I'd just signed a contract. And not just any issue, either—one with me on the cover.

She knew then that her well-established career as a Christian writer was coming to an end.

Other times the dreams were mysterious and charged with numinous energy. After dancing around a campfire with a woman friend in a forest clearing, she dreamed she was back in that circle of trees.

Two red snakes crawl to my feet. I want to run, but stand still. . . . They stare into my eyes . . . I feel my heart grow warm and reaching down, I pick them up, one in each hand, and lift them over my head.

Kidd felt she'd crossed a threshold of some kind in this dream, and was amazed when she later came across a picture of an ancient Minoan statue, depicting a bare-breasted Goddess holding a red snake in each hand, lifting them over her head. How had this Goddess image found its way into her dreams? She found an answer in Jungian analysis, when she came to understand this archetypal image as suggesting she needed to "dig deeper beneath the patriarchal layers" of herself and "find an earlier ground, a realm of feminine valuing."

Goddess dreams became an important part of her experience. In one very moving dream, she is wandering through a museum filled with male statues, and comes upon a previously hidden room, containing a statue of a seated woman, very much like Mary in the Pieta, who held the grown Christ in her lap. *But this statue's lap was empty. So I climb up into it, and to my astonishment, the marble turns to warm, soft flesh. The Goddess comes to life and holds me, kissing my wounded places.*

Kidd calls her spiritual memoir "a woman's journey from Christian tradition to the sacred Feminine." Each step of the journey was furthered by powerful dreams. As Kidd writes, "one of the purest sources of knowledge about our lives comes from the images and symbols deep within." Here's one such knowledge dream, from later on in her journey, which relates back to the initiatory dream and suggests further dimensions of meaning for the newly-born girl child:

In my dream the Goddess was born. Her messengers came like angels of annunciation and told me her name. It was, 'Herself.'