

Six Hundred Years

Meredith Sabini

This article explores two brief but poignant culture dreams: the author's 1982 dream about the Ark breaking and Max Zeller's 1949 dream, which he reported to Jung, about a temple of vast dimensions which he and people around the world were building. Jung gave an estimate of how long this process would take. During the present period of upheaval and chaos, it can be reassuring to know something universal may be emerging.

A dream announced the end of Christianity: *I go around the four directions of a building. A man comes to the front desk holding pieces of an ark. He asks me what it symbolizes. I say, "That the container of Christianity has broken."* It was the Ark that held Noah and the animals; the man had pieces of it in his hands. It's unusual that a dream figure would ask the meaning of a symbol; also unusual for there to be an answer. This dream came to me on December 12, 1982.

My religious inclinations were never really contained by Christianity. I was forced to attend church by my parents, never understanding what sins I was there to atone for or how I had become an "unworthy servant." By adolescence, acute stomach cramps frequently sent me running from the church service. In my twenties and living in San Francisco, I sampled a variety of traditions that seemed less strict—Zen, Bahai, Native American, Taoism, Tibetan Buddhism. I'd read Jung's caution against adopting another culture's practices, encouraging a return to one's own if possible. But the Ark was already breaking; the words in the dream were accurate.

That sturdy ship built in the Tigris-Euphrates valley two millennia ago gave many people passage across the great waters. But its planks were old and its size was always limited. Centuries of rough seas had tossed it around like a dinghy, bringing it to a breaking point. In the 1960s, several decades into the Age of Aquarius, the Ark began to heave on heavy seas and give way. Those of us standing on deck were thrown off into icy waters. Like the *Titanic*, another purportedly unsinkable vessel, the Ark didn't have enough lifeboats. Everyone aboard expected to be carried by the heritage of this great vessel to the Kingdom of Heaven. Instead, we were pitched unceremoniously into the sea, and it's been sink or swim for a good while now.

Some folks bobbed around in the water, clinging to pieces of the Ark, hoping a *deus ex machina* would restore the ship with a bolt of lightning or part the seas for dry land. Others saw the beacons from vessels bearing flags of the major Eastern religions; they eagerly grabbed onto ladders let down for them and were hoisted aboard. Some survived by getting rides from native peoples in dugouts, ending up in tribal countries where they learned to live off the land. Others were fetched out of the water

by the make-shift vessels of cults, cheap imitations that offered easy rescue. Of course, many drowned. It's not easy to be at sea, floundering around.

What was left of the Ark finally washed ashore; the man in the dream held a remnant. Some try to pass their threescore and ten on the remains; they don't notice the cracked hull where saltwater has corroded the fittings. But it provides a quiet life in a safe harbor away from the daunting depths.

There are colonies of survivors from the shipwreck living along the coasts who hunt for sunken treasures, haul them up, and sort them to see what is still of value. Some are artists who spend their time portraying the gleanings from the underwater world. Others are scientists who catalog items from old shipwrecks and add them to the mounting archeological collection.

Some of us disgorged from the Ark discovered we were at home in the waters and instinctively knew how to swim, to hold our breath and dive. Having been sheltered from the great waters by the Ark, we didn't know we had these skills, and we managed in deep waters only because others had been out there before—tribal shamans who navigated the great waters on their own, with only a little guidance; and explorers like Jung, who was taken into the depths of the unknown when he was young and returned to set up camp. At first, he tried to hitch feisty racehorses to the barges that were to haul in the cargo from the ship, but hefty Pilsner stock were needed to do the job properly. And what a job it's been.

Divers have challenging work, going between land and sea, surface and depth. We have to remember to descend slowly and come back up slowly in order not to get the bends. Once in a while, a diver may encounter something irresistibly alluring and may not return to the ordinary world. Others get frightened by the potency of what's below the surface and refuse to go again. Most divers eventually learn that the upper world and the lower world are mirror reflections of each other. Sometimes we forget which domain we are in and start to breathe underwater or to swim on land. Transiting between the worlds is a tough way of life; one is neither fish nor fowl, so to speak.

It turns out there are a lot of ancient vessels resting on the ocean floor. And it's beginning to look as if portions of each could be joined together to form something new, with parts salvaged from the Ark as well. Jung estimated it would take 600 hundred years to put together a container that would hold everyone. A dream he heard in 1949 gave a glimpse of it. The dream was Max Zeller's, a Jewish psychiatrist who was fleeing Europe, in the wake of the Holocaust, to begin his career in Southern California: *A temple of vast dimensions was in the process of being built. As far as I could see—ahead, behind, right and left—there were incredible numbers of people building on gigantic pillars. I, too, was building on a pillar. The whole process was in its very first beginnings, but the foundation was already there, the rest of the building was starting to go up, and I and many others were working on it* (Zeller, 1975, p. 2).

Hearing the dream, Jung commented, "Ja, you know, that is the temple we all build on. We don't know the people because, believe me, they build in India and China and Russia and all over the world" (p. 2).

Then he posed a question to Zeller: "You know how long it will take until it is built?" Zeller said, "How should I know? Do you know?" And Jung replied, "I know. About six hundred years." Zeller asked how he knew this, and Jung said, "From dreams. From other people's dreams and from my own. This new religion will come together as far as we can see" (p. 2).

It's a hard time to be alive, hard times to live through—there's so much chaos, so much at stake. Whenever I feel adrift, bereft of guidance and apprehensive about the

future, I reread Zeller's dream and Jung's response. The dream answered Zeller's burning question about how helping a few patients weekly could possibly make a difference. I find it comforting to know that the foundation of something new might already be in place. And I'm relieved, as Zeller was, knowing that adding my individual contribution to the emerging pillars might be enough.

Meredith Sabini, PhD, is a psychologist with long-standing interest in culture dreams. She is founder/director of The Dream Institute of Northern California, in Berkeley, and compiled the popular anthology The Earth Has a Soul: Jung on Nature, Technology, and Modern Life.

FURTHER READING

Zeller, M. (1975). *The dream-vision of the night*. Los Angeles, CA: Analytical Psychology Club and the C. G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles. (See also the preceding article.)