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Feeding Twin Snakes with Stories

Some Leaves from a Post-Soviet Post-Mature Ego Dream Journal

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This paper describes a story about a “magical” dream in the context of the author’s personal life story formed mainly during the Soviet years. The first impact of this “major” dream almost dissolved the borders between dream and wakeful worlds. During the subsequent nights, the original impulse lost much of its power and was filled with a subtly increasing amount of material of a personal life story and inhibited urges. Consolidation of dream material during morning self-interview contributed to a reduction of its original ambiguity.

The Snake business. What Comus had to learn from Hermes.

IT ALL started when one nice day I learned that I can feed some twin snakes with stories derived from my dreams. Nothing about Kundalini awakening or such. Just an everyday business. Both the very idea and the title came to me as a puzzle, a mystery that is part of some greater mystery. Possibly it looks quite transparent to you, my dear reader. Then just read one more variation of *these* stories. Yes! It is usually so...now you see it and now you don’t. This is not all a clever trick by the author. I feel indeed that I must learn something quite important for myself along with this project. This something seems to be both traditional learning and a kind of vaguely defined but important “training of my soul,” and at the same time also seems to involve a kind of continuation of these dreams in the wakeful world, of some materializing of their message...and my growing to understand better the necessary metaphoric translation from the language of one state to another. There are traditions along these lines. But at the same time I feel that I must be very careful with any translations, theories, systems, interpretations. Twin snakes need to be fed and I

must not risk destroying the very vitamins they need and love. (I am a lazy man—why not? But I understand that every step of mine must be taken carefully and measured against my inner feeling. The space of feeding is a very special space!)

I wrote “post-mature ego” in the title. This would be good possibly for theoretical purposes; in my case it must be read “post whatever-I-had-got.” And both “posts” are really some points of no-one’s-land between different demarcation lines of the border. I must note, too, that the border is not a single abstract line but a complicated structure. People who lived in Soviet times know it well.

A feathered snake.

MY WIFE’S granddaughter reported having received a box of presents from abroad including some toy “snakes” and a wooden flute. Some days later a curious dream occurred: I met a friend of mine living at a very different part of the globe who in my waking reality sent these snakes and had invited me to be his guest for a while next year. In my dream we traveled by car together in Europe. Rather suddenly, as if some text had been deleted, we reached my friend’s home. It looked larger and much more deserted

of things than his everyday-reality house. It was clearly a different one. I looked for a bathroom and after a long search found it. I returned to the room where I had left my friend, and found two giggling girls, his guests, who greeted me, carrying a small snake. The snake was set free and its movements were hauntingly quick. Suddenly, the snake grew stiff and fat, as if filled by blood, then somehow returned to be held by the hands of both these girls, and then it shot a small ball of poison at my left cheek. "Dawning Sun had lightened your eyes and you looked like a bush baby he is usually attacking"—a voice spoke to me. (The snake was of course a closer relative to Jung's "man-eater" [Jung, 1963] and to Blake's visions than to de-high-mythologized Freudian imagery. But what about the Bush Baby? Was it the Burning Babe [Southwell, 1989, p. 96]? or just some contamination with Australia I had also been thinking about?) I went to the bathroom, which in this dream was strangely large and unkempt, to wash my face. End of the Dream. It had a follow-up in a real-life—nevertheless. Next morning, on the way to our Institute, my wife and I met a giant bird of prey—seemingly of eagle-grade—carrying a killed crow in its claws. The crow looked impossibly tiny compared with this giant bird. He was sitting on a branch of a broken tree; then, carrying the crow, slowly took off. We have never seen a bird so large in our region. Had it escaped from the zoo? This did not seem too likely. A magical space and time it really was—this morning. What did it all mean? I don't know. But the constellation of both dream and wakeful imagery (both are illusion, as Advaita Vedanta teaches [Talks, 1972]—sometimes one really feels this way) was revealing a real mythological space: The Eagle/Phallus-like Snake; Sun/Eye mirroring Sun; Girls/Bush Baby. Possibly I am to add that this dream/waking mythological time suddenly embraced me a week or so after the title of this paper struck me out of the blue—powerful but quite mysterious. It really is a title-story. Who is the author? Also, I must add that the same morning I received two e-mail messages from the friend of mine who was the hero of this dream. Both of them contained only a few words. The first: "Lux aeterna." The second: "Lux in tenebris." A timeless message it really was, revealed in a combination-lock style, but not aimed at proving anything. Was it?

A yellow-eyed cat.

SOME TWO weeks after the above dream, another visitor broke into my dreams. This time it was all very realistic, no obvious symbols or hybrid structures. And still the dream was most shocking—inasmuch as I was visited by Joseph Stalin. He was a small but rather thick man, radiating some potential danger. In the dream, I was not scared by him or panicked—but there was a definite feeling of sharing a room with some dangerous creature. His eyes were most fantastic, yellow, and revealing, in some not-too-obvious way, something of the abyss behind his personality. (Cat—or possibly a bird of prey...revealing an unexpected connection between this story and the previous one?) His movements did not belong either to a cat or to a bird; they were rather slow and heavy. The dominant feeling he created was just a wish to leave him, and at the same time, an understanding that it was quite impossible to do so. After waking, I found myself pondering how many individual minds do still contain a representative of this figure. Yes, he has not left the time and space of my psyche (see also Soidla, 1998a). And I hope that this means that the half-century of immunization against his spiritual antigens must still be effective.

The underground blood veins.

THE NEXT notable dream of the last several weeks was seemingly unrelated to the first two stories (possibly one day I'll learn more about this) but most characteristic of the hybrid structures that reveal, if not some "mystical anatomy" of one's individual time (life story) and individual space (personal world), then certainly some anatomy of the dream subspace of reality. Anatomy was certainly a keyword in this dream. I saw St. Petersburg metro lines filled with water. My eye of this dream was able to penetrate the essence of things using some process of half-seeing, half-directly-perceiving concepts—that possibly functions in a waking world as intuition. I perceived (half-saw, half-just-knew-about) boats traveling with great speed on these underground rivers. And an understanding reached me in the following words: that the metro lines are essentially blood veins of the city and they need to be filled with liquid to function properly. The visible

above-the-ground part of this dream communicated some pictures of St. Isaac's square where the Moika canal passes under the huge square. Tourist ships usually pass this way on their sightseeing tours. And repeatedly this quite realistic picture transformed to a quite different thing—I would say, to a definite knowledge penetrated by a dimly perceived picture showing me the action of the watery metro system. Thank You, my mind, for this demonstration! (I would like to add that St. Petersburg is often perceived in Russia as a magical city. About this and about the wider context of St. Petersburg as a cultural myth see Andreev [1997] and Volkov [1995].)

Yellow dominating: the high, dark, not too clean rooms of my dream lectures.

IN THIS dream I found myself in a set of strange huge old-fashioned rooms. High ceilings, very simple chairs and tables of post-war years. No windows; the rooms are connected as an almost endless labyrinth with a dim glow of electric lighting, and in all rooms I notice the same yellow walls with some grayish hue, possibly due to being not too clean. But there are no corners that look really dirty. I am speaking to a group of students, mostly about the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi (Soidla, 1995; Talks, 1972). I meet the group several times in different rooms. There are some problems of finding the right room but they do not become serious. I learn that one of the rooms is regularly used as a cinema (after waking I remembered that cinema is one of the pet metaphors of Ramana Maharshi that allows him to explain the world being but illusion). I feel that my lectures are not quite adequate. There is no panic, no feeling of some catastrophic failure as one often confronts in dreams. No, but still something is subtly wrong; my understanding and ability to express myself are trimmed. I feel a certain pressure in the very air of the room. At the same time the feeling of the dark yellow color around grows more and more prominent. Now it almost dominates the whole scene. I wake up. The understanding that the real hero of the dream was its dark yellow color still continues to grow in me (so I remembered later) and then bursts into consciousness as a kind of light. Now I see how it was. Or: now I have really finished (possibly still on a rather superficial level—but in some sense, yes, finished) the story of this dream.



There followed two other dreams that I did not record properly. Yellow items were passed to me; during several minutes of a half-dream after waking, the yellow color still glowed, dominating the scene—as if it were an unsuccessful massive effort to tell me something.

After a day or two a more articulate dream followed. I was asked to write letters to someone who traveled abroad. In this dream I reentered the atmosphere of the last Soviet “Gorbachev” years: every case of travel to another country is still a very special event (more people are traveling than in “Brezhnev” times, but still not everyone is allowed to do so), every letter addressed to someone abroad, albeit quite legal, nevertheless still can draw the attention of some “competent people”—a common euphemism to denote officers of our secret police. I write a lot of letters on behalf of my colleague. Some of them, for some reason, I put into large-size yellow manila envelopes of the kind most of my readers know. I send the letters off, then, as if some time later, suddenly I am asked to speak with “these people.” They smile and ask why I put small letters into huge envelopes. I am not too afraid, but understand that I am in some kind of trouble. I answer something I cannot quite remember. Suddenly time shifts again. It is clearly current times again, and I learn that my colleague who traveled abroad has killed a top-level American scientist. If in the beginning the colleague was a girl, then by now he is definitely a young man. I understand immediately that this colleague of mine acted not as a trivial murderer or madman but as a spy and a terrorist—I always suspected him of some “bad connections”—and that now I have gotten involved in a very unpleasant story. I am innocent, but why did I not take a more definite stand with this colleague? I certainly should have refused all his requests. (This obviously meant that I have always taken a position of a hidden half-compromise with evil—and now it happened—I am exposed as a part of the evil of our world.) End of the dream. And, half-wakeful, I still feel this large terrible envelope darkly glowing—somehow emanating this special yellow-cum-darkness color the envelopes usually have. I feel that this color is mysteriously connected with the very heart of the story I have gotten involved in and openly speaks of my compromise-mind.

Stalin's eyes, the eyes of the bird of prey, S.'s rooms that change to yellow, dark, huge rooms of my spiritual lectures, yellow-glowing envelope of a story of terrorism, my eyes lit by the Sun: What does your constellation tell me?

A white escape.

NOW WHAT looked like a quite different style of dream—I went for a test for yeast infection. A small door opening directly from a hectic street, a table with a computer, some notebooks. A small white pillow; I have to put on it first my finger and then my penis. Then I awake. Sterile, bleak, white and blue medical atmosphere; I did not notice anything yellow. Had I left the world of yellow? A permanent escape or a temporary one? Or will I be surprised with some quite new turn of the story? Anyway, one more morning with Dr. Freud. Dr. Jung—were you also present? Let me know, please!

White and yellow. An edible book / computer.

AFTER ONE more day I had a very clear dream picture of oranges on snow. This was very clear, very impressive. The snow looked like frozen waves by Hokusai. A few oranges on it. I felt that in a way it knocked out much of the former interpretations leaving me once more confronted with the mystery itself.

There was another picture, and in my dream I knew that I am seeing it for the second time. (Obviously I had not paid any attention to it the first time? My memory seems not to contain any definite answer.) A breastplate was fastened to my left side, made of chocolate, but at the same time this was a kind of computer to transliterate one alphabet to another (Cyrillic to Latin?—I am not quite sure). It was quite like a kind of metaphor of the apocalyptic edible book that emerges in different contexts again and again (as in "Eating Poetry" by M. Strand [1989, p. 363]). I have never thought too much along these lines. And also it was possibly an important signal—no translation, no deciphering, no clever interpretation of metaphors along this dream project—just transliteration. (But what does it mean on deeper level? This does not mean leaving everything as it is, does it? Then what?) Anyway, I'll continue to keep this in mind.

Here I would like to remind you of the apocalyptic text: "And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it my belly was bitter" (Revelation 10, 10)...But texts always lead to other texts. After finding these words I read an issue of *Parabola* (a periodical) devoted to dreams and seeing and found a quote there from G. I. Gurdjieff (Anonymous, 1982): "In reality Kundalini is the power of imagination, power of fantasy which takes the place of a real function...with its help all the centers can be satisfied with the imaginary instead of real." Illusion, yes! But note the idea of Kundalini/imagination satisfying one's centers! Now I understand better the title and the idea of my own paper.

Magic town, patches of wallpaper.

THE DAY I was reading the above mentioned passages from the Apocalypse and Gurdjieff I had the following dream. I found myself together with my wife in a small Western or Central European town. My eyes in this dream were sensitive for items every Russian tourist would have noticed—that the town was very neat and clean. Huge white and yellow buses miraculously passed via very narrow streets up and down small hills. When my wife and I left the cheap hostel we were staying at, I noticed that I had forgotten my red socks—my feet were bare, in yellow shoes, and it was rather cold. But we did not return and somehow I forgot about the socks. What followed was an attempt to find the right bus stop and to buy tickets—an endless chain of mistakes slowly progressing towards some resolution that was still not attained up to the moment when I woke up (but in a way several times fore-intuited in some special bleak haze—each time in a bit different way). I must note that yellow shoes were something quite special in my early years as a poor Soviet schoolboy always wearing ugly black shoes. In some way yellow shoes were a symbol of prosperity for me. So the combination of bare feet and yellow shoes certainly carried both energy and a message.

This forced me once more to revise what the "yellow dreams" of these weeks had shown me: yellow as social danger, yellow as official low budget world I had been living in during most of my life, but also yellow as sun, yellow as fruit, yellow

as luxury. And think of the contrasting images of white and red that got attached to the yellow. The picture of the totality of these dreams looked unusually comprehensive, as if some real important message were communicated, as if a dialogue with some levels of consciousness were set free. But no specific information content could be ascribed to this dialogue. Just a transfer of value and meaning (Frankl, 1969).

The next night I found myself with rolls of wallpaper thinking about how to cut some patches to mask the dirty and damaged places on my wall. The wallpaper was of some ornamental variety, its colors being white, bleak yellow and bleak blue—quite usual for Russia.

The Ray of Amon Ra. Farewell [?].

THIS IS possibly the very end of this yellow string of dreams. Wasn't it a story of an original pure ray of Amon Ra—of the eternal Sun and Bird of Prey—descending, dimming, and getting mixed? I don't know. I have had different opinions.

During the writing about these dreams I noticed how my attention energy was involved in creating both the dreamworld and the wakeful synchronicities, and, in particular, how powerful was the procedure of writing down (or just silently surfacing and repeating) the details of the dream (LaBerge & Rheingold, 1990; Williams, 1980). Otherwise, all the details, and even most of the very feeling of the dream, quickly disappear. At the same time, I noticed that I cannot tell apart the process of recalling the recent details from some much more controversial action of conversion of a vague ambiguous initial impression to a much more definite one—as if suppressing some possibilities inherent in the initial memory in favor of other ones. And I could not be sure that the primary substrate in some cases was not so amorphous that my attempt just created some details from this practically Proteus-like (omnipotential) substrate along the lines of some unconscious drives.

At the same time, the initial impulse that created the first “snake” dream-related triune complex (involving: [1] the composite snake/girls/babe/friend/sun image of my dream; [2] the powerful wakeful icon of the giant bird of prey; and [3] the title of this paper [that in some way surfaced in

my consciousness and instead of offering guidance, at first looked rather opaque and strange])—this holistic, creative and totally new impulse—clearly belonged to the field of Another (Soidla, 1998c), to some magical reality that entered my everyday routine—overpowering, challenging and renewing. But here I can only once more repeat the above “mystical” words about the ray of Amon Ra.

For this period of my life this string is finished, indeed. Last night during a hypnagogic reverie I saw a picture of intense color: dark-blue paratroopers with automatic rifles on green grass with a yellow hue. A dream that followed showed me some spy school girls making love with their instructors in six or seven very dark-gray coffins in a bleak yellow and white room. Most likely this is the way the story ends.

An epilogue.

YES, OBVIOUSLY this story ends here, but of course, it will reemerge in my life and dreams in various “hybrid structures” (Soidla, 1998b). Last night, I noticed that my dream world had returned to usual themes and activities. Let me take this opportunity to say “bye-bye” and to leave the magical world. The process is endless (at least this is the way it looks from my limited point in space and time), but for the sake of this story it is better for me to finish here. I must add that the last dream reported above had a continuation in the world of waking reality. Last evening we got two telephone calls reporting about sudden deaths. (People connect it with unusual climatic phenomena during the last several days.) One of these was a young man, a member of our St. Petersburg Ramana Maharshi group.

Possibly I should also add that the above dreams all took place during the last month. It amounts to about one thousandth of a life span of one quite insignificant inhabitant of this planet—among 5 billion or so. For me it is still surprising how much of universal stuff surfaced during these days—without any serious conscious attempts from my part. (I am a lazy man. I have already admitted this, and I had a lot of other work to do.) I am not even going into the feelings of significance, awe and wonder that accompanied some of the above episodes. You understand. You know these stories.

Life itself, being a great artist (or would one prefer to say—being both the most revealing illusion and the most concealing truth), provided one more—a real final—touch to this story. Two days passed, and my wife and I came across a bird of prey on a half-built nest on a broken pine tree at a nearby park—emitting impressive high-pitched cries. We both were most surprised how much smaller the bird looked this time. A different one? I don't know. But this meeting was certainly telling of a return to smaller things, of the end of this month or so period of mythical time that I had spent “feeding the twin snakes with stories.” End of the message.

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