

AMPLIFICATION: A PERSONAL NARRATIVE

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Introduction

Amplification as an idea or a technique is relatively easy to understand. As a living reality, it is far more elusive to evoke than to explain. The lived reality of weaving an amplification can take on a richness and texture that is as elegant and beautiful as any of the finest fabrics in the world. And amplification, when lived, is a fabric that is woven by time, memory, image, feeling, sensation, idea and perhaps even a glimpse, at times, of divinity.

The goal of amplification is to catalyze a transformative process in the relationship between the personal, cultural and archetypal levels of the psyche. I have come to believe that if an amplification does not find grounding in the emotional reality and embodied experience of an individual, it remains a mostly intellectual, aesthetic, or intuitive "trip" that can be exciting and intriguing, but not much else in terms of individual psychological development. Equally true, however, is the fact that personal experience broadened culturally and deepened archetypally by symbolic amplification is one of the more important contributions of analytical psychology to the modern world. I believe that the study and use of amplification should begin with the specificity and uniqueness of an individual's life that expands into the life of specific cultures, and ultimately finds its roots in the archetypal or universal dimensions of human experience. The quest to find meaning in symbolic imagery by tapping into archetypal sources can transform an individual's life trajectory and release unexpected creative energies.

Personal Story and Original Dream Image

I want to present you with my personal narrative of an experience of amplification. The initial context and setting for this story occurred more than forty years ago and remains alive inside me to this day because the wondrous thing about an amplification living in the psyche is that it continues to weave its magic and meaning over time, as long as one pays attention to it.

As any of you who have kept a journal over time know, there is nothing more embarrassing than to read back over personal material from the past. Of course, some of it is like an old friend that you haven't seen in a long time but a lot of it is like an old acquaintance that you hoped never to see again. I was embarrassed when I looked back over my original medical school journals as part of my "research" for this chapter and narrative. But, there I am—a twenty-three year old medical school student drowning in the first discoveries of the world of medicine and the world of my own psyche.

In the fall of 1965, I enrolled as a first year student at Yale Medical School, having just returned from a year of teaching in Greece following graduation from college. The year in Greece had been one of glorious discovery and the awakening of a thirst for life. I imagined myself following in the footsteps of Nikos Kazantzakis and his *Zorba the Greek*. I explored modern Greece, its magnificent landscapes and people, always accompanied by the haunting memories of the archaic, classical, and Byzantine eras that murmur to one in the stones, the trees, the sky, the sea and especially, for me, through the words of the poets, Kavafy and Seferis. It was like being in a state of mild (and sometimes not so mild) intoxication for a year.

You can imagine how I felt when I returned to the United States and moved into the medical school dorm in New Haven in the fall of 1965. New Haven was quite a long way from Greece and quite a brutal way to sober up from the intoxication of Greek adventures. The newly acquired taste for life vanished almost instantaneously and, as if imprisoned, I felt a dread settle over me—except I didn't have time to get too melancholic because I was so far behind the other first years students, even at the beginning. Most of my classmates came charging into medical school, armed with anatomy, physiology, microbiology and the other basic medical sciences already under their belt from previous studies. I had taken my basic premedical course early in college and hadn't taken a science course in three years.. I was one of those majors in the humanities that medical schools say they like but often tear apart and spit out in no time at all. I didn't come waltzing in; I came in dancing the $\chi\rho\sigma\acute{\omicron}\pi\iota\kappa\omicron$. Yale was enormously forgiving and, unlike any other medical school in the country, had almost no exams for the first two years. They had the strange idea that the students they admitted would find their way and didn't need to be sadistically tortured into becoming good doctors. So, I found myself desperately struggling to catch up in the first two years but not flunking out because we had no tests or grades.

The third year is when we began our clinical rotations and all of my efforts to stay afloat failed when I was actually "tested" for the first time. Until then, I had been able to sneak by. I felt like I had landed in New Haven from another planet, had no sense of belonging and whatever identity I had consolidated to date, began to crumble almost immediately. Wherever my psyche was living, it was not at medical school, although I worked as hard as I could to catch up. In this frame of mind, I began my internal medicine rotation and within the first day or so, I was assigned to examine a man who had just been admitted to the ward with a stroke. When I entered the room, he was surrounded by a family in great distress. Whatever primitive medical and human skills I had begun to develop deserted me. I fumbled through taking a history from the family and performing a physical exam on an elderly man who was comatose. For me, it was an agony of incompetence and being overwhelmed with fear and doubt. Shortly after that, I was called to join our "rounds" of all the patients on the ward. Rounds included the resident, interns, medical students and an attending physician—a virtual sea of white coats swooping into hospital rooms and often the most difficult moments in peoples' lives. The attending asked us how one could tell the difference between a midbrain stroke and one that had occurred higher up in the brain. I froze—I only knew that the man I

had tried to examine couldn't talk and didn't respond to any stimuli. I did learn in those rounds that someone with a midbrain stroke is staying alive with only the so-called "vegetative functions" intact—respiration and heart beat. But, after the rounds, I simply walked off the wards, went back to my dormitory room, closed the door and didn't come out for two or three days. Eventually, the resident phoned and asked what had happened to me. I said that I couldn't come back. I went to the Student Health Department and began to talk to a kind, resident psychiatrist and within about six weeks, found myself meeting a Jungian analyst for the first time. My first visits to the Jungian brought some relief.

Talking with someone who took my pain and my humanity seriously got my own midbrain going a bit. I was able to tell the analyst about my time in Greece and my childhood. In the context of becoming a medical student, one childhood memory kept recurring with a surprising poignancy. I remembered throwing a rock at a friend and drawing blood from his forehead when I was eight years old. I was competitive but not combative. At the time, his father was my mother's doctor and my mother was suffering severe ulcerative colitis that required major abdominal surgery and the removal of a large portion of her small intestine. As a result of the disease and surgery, my mother lost twins with whom she was pregnant at the time. I didn't understand any of this as an eight year old; I only knew that I had drawn blood from the son of my mother's doctor.

Often in driving to those first sessions with my analyst, I would experience excruciating headaches as I began to reflect on how I had ended up in medical school. It is in this context that I remember my first experience of "amplification". My analyst was trying to help me connect my experience in Greece with my childhood experience of my mother's illness and my being in medical school. She left the room and brought back a book of photographs of classical Greek sculptures. She showed me an image of a boy being carried on the shoulders of an older, strong Greek man. I think she was trying to help me connect my deep feelings of being a very vulnerable boy with potential feelings of manly strength—perhaps pointing the way to connect to an inner father figure. I think she was showing me what she imagined would be helpful.

I had read about amplification and knew a bit about the difference between free association and amplification which one might think of as a guided or directed cultural/archetypal association to a potentially related tale or myth. I could sense that my analyst was attempting to broaden my story, to give it a deeper context, to connect it with an eternally recurring human situation so that I wouldn't feel so alone in my suffering. Perhaps I might even see meaning in my suffering and get a glimpse of how my story might progress or find some healing. The fact is that none of that occurred. What did occur to me was a bit of pleasure at being treated as if my personal journey had some connection to the Greeks. But the image itself did not grab me and I only remember it now because it was my first experience of amplification and that it fell flat. What did have meaning to me was the thought that I might be a candidate for being initiated into the Jungian mysteries and their sacred rite of amplification. I guess I also learned that, as with anything else, our techniques are no guarantee of their being useful or meaningful. I was an "amplificatee manqué".

However, other Jungian approaches, directly related to amplification, began to become real for me in those early analytic encounters and eventually offered a gateway into an authentic experience of amplification that has been deeply and continually important in my development. I learned to remember my dreams; I began to draw some dreams; and I learned to think symbolically about my life experiences. These developments began to occur in the months following the initial crisis. The intensity of my panic, my terror, my feeling of being out of place and overwhelmed, of being incapable of continuing, subsided somewhat. The Dean of Yale Medical School treated me with great compassion for which I am deeply grateful and this was long before the word “compassion” became an advertising slogan for selling hospital care. I worked out an arrangement with the Dean. We agreed that I would take an extra year to complete medical school and between each clinical rotation, I would take the equivalent of the next rotation “off” and write about my experiences. The school actually allowed me to pace myself and find a way to begin to integrate what I was experiencing inside with what I was learning in the various clinical rotations. It was not only a lifesaver, it actually allowed me to begin to reflect and grow at a pace that was more humanly adapted to my needs. I had learned in Greece that one could take a nap in the afternoon and that one could pause to enjoy life and Yale made major accommodations to my need to take my own time getting through medical school.

It was the remembering and drawing of dreams that led me to a real experience of amplification. For me, the difference between the first, failed attempt at amplification and the later, more compelling experience was that the content of the material that led to a rich amplification arose in a dream. It came from an unknown but potent place within me and the innerness of its origin made connecting it to a source from another time and place in the world very real and powerful. In other words, the amplification spoke to a felt experience that first came from a deep source inside of me. The gateway to my initiation into the value of amplification came via a “big dream”:

(1969)

I stand face to face with a large “circus” snake. I don’t know how I know it is a “circus” snake or even what a “circus” snake is. The name simply announces itself to me in the dream. Maybe it has something to do with magic and mystery. I know that I want to flee from it. My mother stands behind me and insists that I stand my ground and meet it. It stands as tall or even taller than I and is glowing and radiating energy. We look one another straight in the eye and I sense that its intentions towards me are not malevolent. They might even be good.



Figure 1: Dream of snake, boy, mother. Source : Author's drawing.

Snake as phallus, snake as healer, snake as kundalini, snake as the mystery of death/rebirth and immortality—the living symbol came alive in me, although I knew nothing of the multiple symbolic meanings of the serpent at the time of the dream. And the word “circus” came over time to suggest magic, illusion, play, fantasy, mystery, and the hint of other realms of being that I later came to recognize as belonging to “psyche” as elaborated in such films as *Pan’s Labrynth* or Fellini’s *Armacord*. All of these possibilities accrued to the dream in the process of amplification over many decades.

In my first reactions to the dream, I really only knew that I was facing something terrifying which my mother was insisting that I face head on. Two associations (not amplifications) presented themselves to me at the time of the dream:

1. I had literally run from the medical wards in the horror of seeing a dying man and his grieving family, propelled by my own feelings of utter inadequacy. My analyst as mother helped me begin to face more squarely the mysteries of life and death that were terrifying me and from which I was trying to flee.

2. My own mother had done pretty much the same thing on another occasion that actually came the summer before my melt down on the medical wards. I had just finished my first two years of medical school and taken the first part of the National Board exams. I had the summer off and had arranged to travel to Bolivia with a close friend whose father was stationed in LaPaz as part of a US Aid program. We were going to work with a medical missionary in the sparsely populated lowlands of Bolivia which were just being opened up for settlement in a program sponsored by the Bolivian government. Indians from the Altiplano, living at an altitude of 11,000 feet, were being relocated to the sea-level jungle territories of Bolivia.

Before heading off to Bolivia on my next adventure as a would-be global citizen, I had gone back to St. Louis, Missouri to make a brief visit with my mother and father. My father was scheduled for a complicated neurosurgical procedure as he had considerable pain and loss of function secondary to osteoarthritis in the cervical spine. I wanted to see him before going to

South America. I was scheduled to leave a few days before his surgery. On the appointed day I said my goodbyes, went to the airport, boarded the plane, and before we had even begun to taxi away from the gate, the man sitting next to me died almost instantaneously of a heart attack. He was laid out in the aisle and I just remember looking at his short, black socks and the white, hairless skin above them. The flight was delayed, of course, as the body had to be removed from the plane. The thought of my father about to undergo neurosurgery and the corpse lying next to me was enough to make me insist on exiting the plane. The TWA officials were reluctant to let me disembark but I would not take “no” for an answer and left the plane with the body. When I arrived home by taxi, my mother was surprised. I told her what happened. Her seemingly heartless response astounded me. She said that I could only stay home for twenty-four hours and then I would have to leave. I later came to realize that she did not want me to stop my life just as it was beginning in the fear of losing my parents. She was fearful that I would be trapped in the guilt and mutual dependency of caring for ill parents which had been a significant part of my father’s fate in having to look after his father who lived until the age of 99. She had seen life itself stop in the fear of death. She, like my dream mother, wanted me to face the realities of illness and death head on and to embrace its painful truths by affirming life. It was a brutal lesson. These were among my personal “associations” to the dream of the “glowing and radiating” serpent.

Cultural and Archetypal Amplification of a Dream Image

The amplification of the dream in terms of deepening its meaning by connecting it to a mythologem came later when I managed to graduate from medical school and begin my internship and residency in psychiatry. I continued my analysis with a second Jungian in San Francisco and, as he became familiar with my personal history, he suggested that I might be interested in Jane Harrison’s *Themis*, which is an exploration of the mythology of the pre-classical, pre-Olympian Greeks. I took his suggestion to heart in the belief that my analyst knew something of undiscovered value and meaning to my life. The process of amplification can originate in a positive transference to the analyst as having the wisdom of the wise old woman or man about those mysterious things that hold the key to unraveling and understanding one’s past, present and future.

It was the introduction to *Themis* that truly began for me the amplification of the serpent dream in which the archetypal dimensions of the snake began to come into focus. I read and reread *Themis* over many years. And eventually, perhaps thirty years after my dream of the serpent, I “saw” for the first time in one of my many readings of *Themis* that my own drawing of 1969 had a parallel image in Harrison’s book. I came to understand that the two images—one from my psyche and one from the psyche of the pre-classical Greeks-- are grounded in the same archetypal reality. Sometimes, explorations of the psyche—one’s own or those of others--feel like a detective story that surprises one in the twists and turns of unraveling some basic mystery.

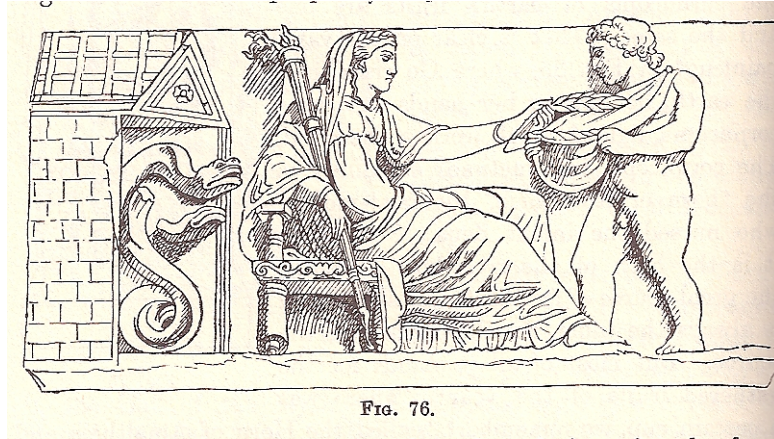


Figure 2: Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1912), p. 286.

Amplification, in its goal of connecting personal material to the cultural and archetypal foundations of human experience, often opens up a whole new world view to an individual. In the amplification of my original snake dream, I began to appreciate the vast and beautiful world view of pre-Olympian, matriarchal Greek society to which the serpent will be our focus and guide.

1. *Mana* and the Snake

Looking more closely at the image I drew in 1969, one notices the simple, radiating lines that surround the serpent, suggesting the huge energies that emanate from its being.



Figure 3: author's drawing

I came to understand that these energetic vibrations in my primitive drawing are representations of *mana*. The notion of *mana* is common to many so-called more “primitive” societies. *Mana* is a mysterious power that resides in all things. It connects the seen and the unseen, the living and the dead, the organic and inorganic. *Mana* is the indwelling, vitalizing force inherent in all created matter. In the yogic traditions, the *mana* of the snake has been fully elaborated into a way of understanding *shakti*, the serpentine libidinal energy that is coiled at the base of the spine. One can easily imagine the snake in my drawing as an image of *kundalini* as well as of *mana*.

I stumbled on a moving example of *mana* in the mid 1970's while wandering through the Plaka, the old village-like section of Athens just beneath the Acropolis. I came across a strange store window full of stones with human faces and animal forms that seemed to emerge from beneath the stone's surface. Inside, a haggard, middle-aged woman sat behind a glass counter and I asked about her unique store. She told me that her son had been part of the student uprising against the Greek Colonels' regime at the Athens Polytechnic in November, 1973. Dozens of students occupying the University were murdered when the Colonels sent a tank and armed troops through the gates. The shopkeeper's son was one of the students killed by the Colonel's soldiers. She described falling into a prolonged, profound depression in the melancholic grief over her lost son. One day she noticed a stone on the ground and saw a face in it. She picked it up and started collecting stones in which she saw figures that she would highlight. She recounted how she slowly came back to life by seeing life in the stones. She decided to open the store to memorialize her son and tell her story. The store, the stones, the woman, the story all seemed improbably moving to me. They were filled with the *mana* of her story and how she came back to life in rediscovering the *mana* of life itself in seemingly inanimate matter.

2. Totemism, The Tribe and the Snake

In the evolution of the human psyche, totemism is a central station along the way in the development of consciousness. Totemism links the psyche of the group to the natural, human, and supernatural or spiritual realms. Totemism is at the heart of the world-view in which interpenetrating *mana*, or life force, shares in common being. Totemism posits an intimate relationship between a group of kindred people on one side and a species of natural or artificial objects on the other side. What happens to one member of the totem group happens to all the others in the group. In the totemistic stage of belief, people rarely set themselves apart from the tribe or the world around them as individuals.

Central to being initiated into a totemistic clan is the idea of group unity, a sense of belonging to a common group life, and this participation extends to the nonhuman as well as the human world. The group seeks to affirm its unity and to express its emotion about that unity with the avowal of a common kinship with its totem plant or animal. For instance, after my snake dream, I fantasized for years that, in my inner world, I was being initiated into a snake clan. Through ritual initiation, the young man or woman joins the tribe.

One of the marvelous images in Harrison's *Themis* is of Cecrops, the mythological founder and first king of Athens. The representation of Cecrops as half man, half serpent tells us that he originates from and participates in an instinctual connection to the earth and the realm of the Great Mother. As a cultural hero in

founding Athens, he is alleged to have instituted marriage, reading, writing and ceremonial burial (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cecrops_I). For our purposes, the image tells us that the connection to the earth through the snake was a positive and primary contributor to the origin of the tribe and of human culture and achievement.



Image 4: Harrison, page 263

Cecrops per Harrison page 263 (image 63): upper half as civilized statesman in reverent attitude to birth of holy child; lower half without feet, only a coiled snake's tail.

One does not need to scratch very far beneath the surface of everyday contemporary life to see that the belief in *mana*, the belief in the shared identity of belonging to a particular totem group, and the belief that what happens to that totem group is essential to the ongoing vitality of the tribe and all its members is alive and well around the world today. For instance, those in countless cities around the United States united in the love of a baseball or any other sports' team and its totem bird or animal share in their city's common being and fate. The depth of feeling and reverent attitude to the baseball season in which many experience year in and year out rebirth in the spring and, for most, death in the fall mirrors the ancient cycle of totem life as experienced by the ancient Greeks. Everybody in the community of fans participates in the course of the season and what happens to one happens to all as part of the tribe. And perhaps closer to home for the readers of this book, many believe that belonging to the Jungian totem group is essential to the ongoing vitality of our own tribe and the world.



Figure 5
Thomas Singer and Stuart Copans, A Fan's Guide to Baseball Fever: The Official Medical Reference (San Francisco, Elijim Publications, 1991)p. back cover.

Baseball fans as serpents, rooting for opposing teams, circle around the baseball bat, the axis mundi of the game. It takes opposing forces for the game to be played, enjoyed, and suffered.

3. Life Daimon, Rebirth and the Snake

At an even deeper level than signifying the cultural origins of a city and tribe, the snake for the earliest Greeks was believed to be the very incarnation and spirit of the principle of regeneration and immortality. As a *life daimon*, the serpent was closely associated with the Great Mother and the mysteries of renewal. The souls of the dead, as well as the seeds of the plants, were returned to the underworld where they participated in the preparations for rebirth. The shadow of the dead, the *keres*, took the form of small, winged creatures whereas the strength and vitality of the dead, the *thumos*, passed into the serpent as illustrated in figure 6. The reincarnation of the tribe as a whole, not a specific individual, occurs through the *thumos* of the snake.



figure 6: Harrison, p. 291

The snake was viewed not only as the source of the tribe and the city, but as the source of life itself. This accounts for the importance of the snake in the pre-patriarchal world view of the Greeks which was most clearly visible in *Python's* central role at Delphi, the religious center of Greece in both its pre-patriarchal and Olympian eras (find reference to Python).ⁱ Python, the serpent, was later replaced at Delphi by Apollo who became the symbolic representative of the patriarchal era.

The ancient Greeks were deeply tuned into the what Harrison calls “the great reincarnation cycle of man and nature.”ⁱⁱ The early Greek’s religious imagination connected the spirit of life in man with the cycle of the seeds of plants and the cycles of the moon going down into the underworld and coming up again with new life. All of this was the realm of the snake who, as companion of the Great Mother, presided over and carried the *mana* of these deepest mysteries of death and rebirth. These primal insights were ritualized in the rites of the *Antheateria* and its *panspermia*. In the *panspermia*, all the varieties of seeds that produced food were boiled in a pot. They were not eaten by the living. Rather the souls of the dead, the *keres*, came up during the *Antheateria* in the spring, and took the seeds down to the underworld to promote their rebirth. The seeds carried underground by the *keres* in the Spring were brought back in the Fall as the *pankarpia*—the fruit of the seeds. So reincarnation and rebirth in this early Greek mythologem applies to the race of man and plants as a whole. The genius of the ancestors is reborn, not in individual form, but as the ongoing life of the group.

In considering the *panspermia* as part of the early Greek understanding of how life is created and recreated, one might want to add at this juncture that the snake as phallus can be thought of as a prime contributor to the *panspermia*. Certainly, the snake and the phallus bear striking physical resemblance to one another; each seem to have a regenerative capacity unique to their being; and, as many have noted over the millennia, each seems to have a mind of its own. It is an occasional achievement of mankind to regulate the contribution of snake as phallus to the *panspermia* and more often than not, snake as phallus is constantly contributing to the flow, even overflow, of *panspermia*. The snake as phallus with its enormous energy and drive is certainly as big as the snake in my dream as a young medical student.

4. The Snake in Transformation and healing

As a natural extension of the ancient Greeks' basic understanding of the cycle of life/death/and rebirth, a cult of healing and transformation grew up around the figure of Aesclepius who, like the Great Mother, also had as his companion the snake. The Aesclepiian cult emphasized a ritualized, therapeutic dreaming in which suffering human beings would dream their way to a cure by a journey to the underworld where, if they had good fortune, the serpent would initiate their healing. In our modern formulation, we would say that the psyche was encouraged to go into the unconscious to find the healing bite of the snake that would lead to regeneration, renewal and healing.



Figure 7: Harrison, 382

This image shows Aesclepius, the god, in human form, leaning on his staff, attending his worshippers. The holy snake stands behind, equal in size, stature, and majesty.

A more modern account of the presence of Aesclepius in my own narrative follows in the section "Bringing the Cultural and Archetypal Amplification of a Dream Image Back Home."

6. Evil, death, distrust, paranoia and the Snake

Harrison focuses almost exclusively on the buried, matriarchal strata of the human psyche in which the snake as a positive attribute of the Great mother is all but forgotten in contemporary consciousness. Just as the matriarchy fell under the power of the patriarchy at Delphi, the snake was banished to the darker realms of human experience. Harrison bypasses the “modern”, negative aspects of the snake that are more familiar to us and which are essential to any complete amplification of its symbolic meaning. We all know that the snake is not exclusively about renewal, regeneration, rebirth, vitality, and energy. It has a potentially dark side as well.

In fact, my first actual encounter with a snake in Greece was in 1965 when I went to Corfu with a group of friends. We came across a lovely house that we were able to rent for a few days as it was off-season. Only after renting the house did we learn that it was Gerald Durrell's home—a naturalist and brother to Lawrence Durrell, the famous novelist who wrote *The Alexandrian Quartet*.ⁱⁱⁱ Gerald Durrell's *My Family and Other Animals* is a delicious chronicle of his boyhood explorations of the local fauna and flora of Corfu, including his family.^{iv} In fact, I was reading the book when we found ourselves staying in his house. A few of us walked to town one day to buy some food supplies and, on the way back, noticed a slow moving snake in the rocks amidst the terraced olive groves. It was early spring and the snake was just emerging from hibernation. Durrell's influence led us to pick the snake up, using our light jackets as protective gloves. His book is full of playful jokes and, in that spirit, we emptied a box of candy bars we had bought in town and put the snake in the empty box. We returned to the house and told our friend who had remained behind that we had brought him some chocolate. We watched in delight as he opened the box and begin to reach for a candy bar. He jumped in fright at seeing the snake coiled up. We thought we were hilarious until the old caretaker who rented us the house knocked on the door. News of our discovery had reached him and he wanted to see the snake for himself. We took the box out into the courtyard. The old man, who had suffered a stroke, was leaning on a cane. He could only speak from one side of his mouth with great difficulty, but his uttered phrase emerged with great clarity: “Thanatos Amesos” (CONVERT TO GREEK). “Instant death,” he said and soon returned with an ax and chopped the snake's head off. We felt quite foolish about our childish prank when we realized that we were actually playing with death.

The snake is not just about healing (farmaka)(CONVERT TO GREEK) and rebirth. It can also be about death, poison, evil, distrust, and paranoia. In fact, most of us know about the serpent as a seducer who introduces the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden. The more sinister sides of snake symbolism appear in the poisonous distrust and paranoia, that enter intrapsychic processes, interpersonal relationships, group dynamics and international relationships.

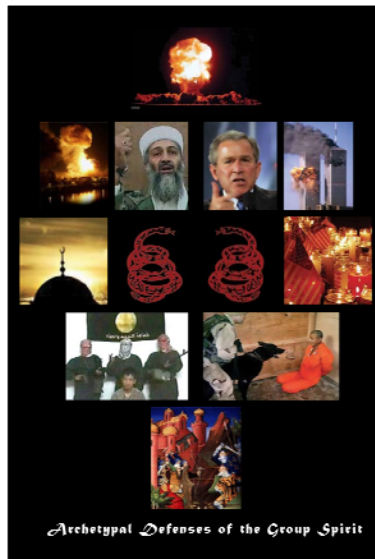


FIGURE 8: THE SAN FRANCISCO JUNG INSTITUTE LIBRARY JOURNAL, VOL 25, NUMBER 4, AUTUMN 2006, COVER IMAGE BY DYANE SHERWOOD AND Jacques Rutzky

In the image of George Bush and Osama bin Laden illustrating the darker aspect of the serpent, one can see two snakes paired off against one another as being at the archetypal heart of the deep suspicions that bring death and destruction to opposing international forces—such as those between the Western and Islamic worlds. To connect personally with the archetypal power of the serpent requires that one locate the living serpent in oneself—in its creative and destructive potential, in its healing and poisonous potential, in its capacity for death and rebirth, and in the terrifying potential for distrust, suspicion, paranoia and evil in one's own being.

Bringing the Cultural and Archetypal Amplification of a Dream Image Back Home

In providing this quick tour of the amplification of the snake image, my goal has been to bring the reader into an ancient worldview that is quite different from our ordinary, 21st century consciousness. It is a view of man, nature, and spirit that saw its flowering around 1500 B.C. or some 3500 years ago. When I try to imagine the world from that point of view, entering the world of the snake as described by Harrison and attempting to bring that perspective into today's world, I feel quite upside down. It is so alternative to our modern psyche that there is no way I can or should take it on entirely, as if I could totally replace one worldview with another. It's not that I am suddenly and totally transported to pre-patriarchal times and replace all of the beliefs and attitudes of our worldview with Harrison's pre-Olympian cosmos. But, I do find myself taking in pieces of that radically different way of seeing the world which opens up, broadens, and complements how I look at experience both in the inner and outer world.

In digesting Harrison's *Themis* over many decades, I now find myself inhabiting our contemporary world just a bit differently--in a way that is more receptive to and animated by the serpentine energies of life. At times, I feel that the Earth Mother and her consort, the snake, have initiated me into a more natural embrace of instinctual life, instinctual energies, and their blessings. I picture the inner reality of the snake as a being that is exquisitely sensitive to changes

in the inner and outer environment, whose reactions can be slow and rhythmic when in tune with the flow of life or sudden and violent in striking out when threatened. The snake sways to the vibrations of the inner and outer world. The energy that emanates from the snake gives vitality and dynamism to our emotional, physical and spiritual reality.

I think of the realm of the snake as offering a bottom/up, non rational center of consciousness rather than a more modern, top/down rational view in which the mind orders everything. The dilemma of trying to integrate the ancient snake psyche of Harrison and the contemporary rational mind is akin to what the Jungian tradition speaks of as bringing the unconscious and conscious mind into dialogue. It is absurd to think that I could or would want to permanently relocate in the archaic and magnificent worldview of Harrison's *Themis*. Rather the challenge as I see it is to develop the capacity to move back and forth between these two world views on certain occasions with the hope that they might at times be complimentary rather than antagonistic.

Amplification of a symbolic dream image challenges us to look at our familiar point of view through new eyes and with new understanding—and to bring that alternative psyche into dialogue with our contemporary consciousness. With that in mind, I want to circle back to the beginning of the paper and bring this exploration of the amplification of a dream snake back into relationship with my personal life. I consider this exercise essential because it is only in the meeting of the uniquely personal and the archetypally universal that amplification of a dream symbol takes on the depth of its potential meaning and value. For instance, “healing” as an abstract universal principle can become a calling card or marketing device for modern and/or “alternative” medicine, including Jungian psychotherapy. But, “healing” as an abstract principle is relatively meaningless without connection to the specific and unique suffering of the individual. Personal and archetypal, unique and universal need one another for the living reality of the amplification of a dream image/symbol to weave its magic. For archetypal “healing” to be real, it requires the specificity of a unique human situation to come alive.

I want to offer an example of how the serpent as healing energy came alive in my psyche—some forty years after my original snake dream. It occurred in the context of a serious health problem I developed as I approached my 70th year, just as my original snake dream occurred in the context of being a medical student facing serious illness and death decades before. The snake itself is not present in the two dreams I am going to relate, but the serpent energy as Aesclepiian healing wisdom emerges from the unconscious, making its point of view available to consciousness. The upside down wisdom of the unconscious speaks to the top down knowledge of the rational mind in this anecdotal story.

A few years ago I developed such severe back pain that I could hardly walk and at times had to use a cane and then a walker. I wondered if I was now walking in my father's footsteps when he faced a deteriorating spine as I was heading off to Bolivia as a young man. Workups of my spine, including x-rays and MRI's, revealed severe stenosis at several levels of the lumbar spine. I trusted my spine doctor who worked very closely with the orthopedic surgeon. After months of conservative physical therapy failed and my pain was only getting worse, we all agreed that I needed surgical intervention and a spinal fusion at two levels was recommended and scheduled. A few weeks before the surgery, I woke up with a short dream: “I am lying on the operating table as the surgery is about to begin. I realize that I have not signed the consent form for the operation.” The anticipation of major surgery makes all of us anxious, but this dream suggested I was not prepared. I told the dream to my spine doctor, who is sensitive and thoughtful. A day or so later he called back and said that, at a routine review of upcoming surgical cases, it was decided that they would do a fusion at one level rather than two. A few weeks later, I awoke with a second dream:

“I am on the operating table. The procedure is going well and is nearly finished. At the last minute, the surgeon takes out a hammer and chisel—which doesn’t look too good to the “me” as hovering observer over the “me” on the operating table.”



Figure 9: Courtesy Jules Cashford:

Again, I communicated the content of the dream to my physician. And again, he took my case to the weekly surgical review board and they decided to do a simpler laminectomy rather than a fusion. This time, I actually did go forward with the less radical surgery and it went well. I experienced a dramatic reduction in pain and improvement in mobility. I had some subsequent complications which responded well to injections and currently—“dox to theo” (PUT INTO GREEK), “thanks be to God”—I am doing well. There are several doctors and many gods to thank in my positive outcome to date and at least one of them has to be Aesclepius and his healing snake because dream incubation figured prominently in my therapeutic process and outcome. An active dialogue between conscious and unconscious, a sensitive doctor who responded to the dream communication, and a fine surgeon all contributed to my improvement. The serpent has its own wisdom (reference *The Wisdom of the Serpent*) which is different from the wisdom of the rational mind. ^v Modern healers, including physicians, nurses, and others in the helping professions are “armed” with all sorts of diagnostic and therapeutic tools. Some even have acquired over time an attitude of receptivity to the wisdom of the serpent. We can think of “the wisdom of the serpent” as a non rational “tool” which provides a different attitude towards illness, healing, and the psyche. It does not have to be seen as oppositional to conventional, modern healing techniques but as complimentary. For example, I did proceed with surgery which was beneficial, but the “wisdom of the serpent” helped guide the decision about which surgery was best for me.

Conclusion

There is a creative impulse among human beings to give substance and form to the fruits of our imaginal journeys. Jung gave expression to that inner necessity in his *Red Book* images and later in his stone carvings at Bollingen. Such potent inner images want to come into the

world. This was something that Joe Henderson, with whom I worked for many years, knew from his own experience of analysis with Jung and his own initiatory dreams of the snake (reference my chapter in book on initiation).^{vi} Dr. Henderson understood that the study of symbolic imagery using the royal road of amplification could be a significant contribution of analytical psychology to the process of individuation and this belief stimulated him to take a lead role in the way in which ARAS, the Archives for Research into Archetypal Symbolism, gave form to its collection. Because of my own deep interest in symbolic imagery, Dr. Henderson encouraged me to get involved in ARAS and in 1991, I had a big dream that made me want to contribute in my own way to the development of amplification resources:

I am sitting with Dr. Henderson in a state-of-the art electronic studio in which symbolic imagery from all the world's cultures since the beginning of time are being transmitted. The room is filled with gleaming gadgetry with lights flashing through which images and their symbolic commentary are being beamed out to the citizens of the world.

Working with a small group of likeminded supporters of this vision, we actually raised the money to digitize the ARAS collection and create an internet site that, over the past decade, has become a home that facilitates the journey of amplification. Now, for instance, if I want to explore the symbolic imagery and archetypal commentary of the snake from cultures around the world, I can initiate a search which will access in 1.16 seconds the fact that ARAS Online has 1078 snake images. The distribution of the images in terms of time and culture are simultaneously demonstrated on a cross cultural time line.

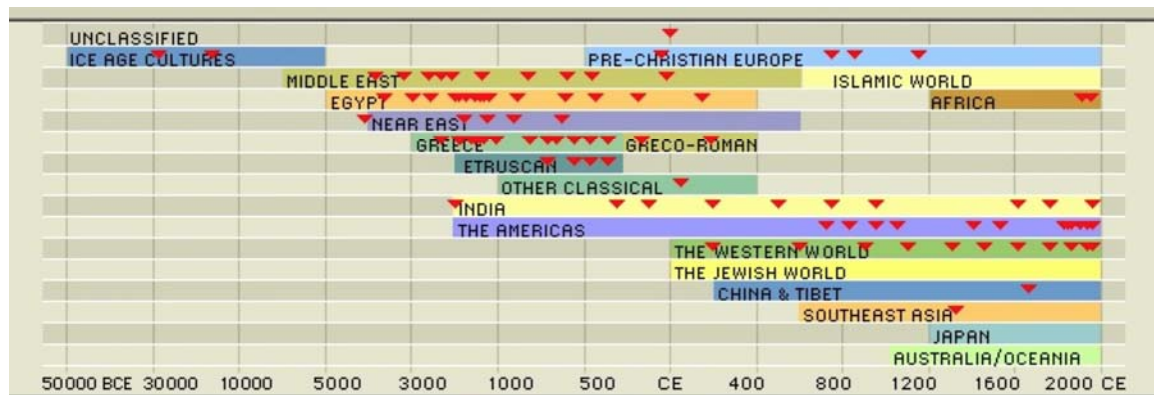


Figure 10: Courtesy of ARAS. Cultural Time Line of Snake Imagery

Of course, it may take decades in any individual's life for any of these images to take on real meaning, even though one can gain access to them instantaneously. Most of us need just a few images in a lifetime to experience the value of amplification. I think that undertaking a journey of amplification is a bit like what I have learned about going to cocktail parties—I consider the evening a success if I end up having one good conversation. The same may be said of an amplification: we should consider ourselves lucky if we have one big image/amplification in a lifetime that leads into the psyche in some depth.

Following in Dr. Joseph Henderson's footsteps, I have come to believe that amplification for the individual is most valuable when one is attentive to the personal, cultural and archetypal levels of psychic reality. A purely archetypal approach is a great "trip" but often has little connection to one's actual life. And focusing only on the personal level cuts off the potential for depth that comes

through connecting with the archetypal dimension. And, both personal and archetypal experiences are most often filtered through a cultural level that mediates between the two. Equal attention to all three gives the greatest possibility for the “royal road” of amplification to become a living tapestry of great riches.

ⁱ Python need to get information on book re publisher etc

ⁱⁱ Harrison, p. 292.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lawrence Durrell, *The Alexandria Quartet* (New York, Penguin Books, 1991).

^{iv} Gerald Durrell, *My Family and Other Animals* (New York, Penguin Books, 2004).

^v Joseph Henderson and Maude Oakes, *The Wisdom of the Serpent* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990).

^{vi} Thomas Singer, “In the footsteps: the story of an initiatory journey” in *Initiation: The Living Reality of an Archetype*, edited by Thomas Kirsch, Virginia Beane Rutter, and Thomas Singer (London and New York, Routledge, 2007), pp. 15-25.