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BETWEEN
SPIRITUALITY
AND
PSYCHOTHERAPY

Healing "The Grief our Fathers Lived"

A Weekend with Robert Bly



By Charles H. Simpkinson, Ph.D.

Wounded veterans of the Oedipal war—some 70 men*—gathered in April at the Kirkridge mountain-top retreat in Bangor, Pennsylvania. There with Robert Bly, 59-year-old world-famous poet, troubador and popular men's advocate, we hoped to regain the masculine vitality we had lost in an empty victory over our fathers.

Bly's shaggy white hair and gruff, yet compassionate manner made it easy to see him as the quintessential father/grandfather, an archetypal figure ideal for officiating over this gathering of fathers and sons. Standing in front of a large stone fireplace, Bly listened attentively, while we men, ages 20 to 60, confessed that something was missing in our lives. Many times, our stories involved the Oedipal scenario of getting too close to mother and too distant from father.

As the session unfolded, Bly talked to the group, recounted myths and fairy tales, and recited poems to the accompaniment of his Greek lute. But what he really did was enchant us with the possibility of finding hidden psychic treasures—our dragons, giants and witches. He beckoned us to an inner descent in search of the wild hairy male buried at the bottom of our psyches.



Photo by Art Dahl

Robert Bly

believes that the oldest son and the mother moved closer together. Too young to contain the displacement of his mother's sexuality onto him, the boy abandons the lower part of his body in order to escape his own forbidden sexual response. He then becomes what Bly terms a "swan" or "flying boy." Throughout their lives, these "flying boys" remain perpetual Peter Pans who resist growing up and who are unable to sustain a committed sexual relationship. Bly also sees in them a premature interest in higher consciousness and spirituality. He accuses them—half jokingly, half seriously—of preferring to bathe their buried dragons in the "purple radiance of their heart chakras." "This kind of divine quest for higher consciousness," he says, can only come later after doing the necessary work on the psyche.

Grieving Twice Over

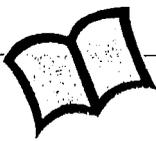
Failure to resolve the Oedipal conflict is, of course, not new. What is new, Bly explains, is that the cultural buffers that once corrected these family distortions are now missing for many young boys. Bly points to the demise of male initiation rites—usually performed by older men in the community or extended family—that helps boys separate from their mothers. He describes, for example, an Australian aboriginal ceremony in which male "mothers" help a boy separate by having him travel

The Initial Loss

Freud used the myth of Oedipus to portray the eternal family conflict in which the son competes with his father for the mother's affection. In Bly's view, the Industrial Revolution intensified this conflict by increasingly taking father and his work out of the home. To compensate for this loss, Bly

Robert Bly, *continued page 13*

*The 12 women who were present worked on aspects of their inner male (animus); some, who were single parents told of concern regarding the rearing of their sons.



BOOKS IN REVIEW

A TESTAMENT OF DEEP FAITH

SOUL THEOLOGY: THE HEART OF AMERICAN BLACK CULTURE

By Henry H. Mitchell and
Nicholas Cooper Lewter
Harper and Row

San Francisco, California, 1986

Reviewed by
M. Muggy Do Dickinson

Soul Theology is a powerful book, and I must testify about its impact on me. Not only did it enhance my spiritual strength and deepen my respect for the burden bearers of the world, but it brought back powerful memories of my grandmother and the way she lived her invincible faith.

The book, written by Henry H. Mitchell, Dean of the School of Theology, Virginia Union University, and psychotherapist Nicholas Cooper Lewter, begins with the belief that people growing up in the Black community are "equipped with a system of core beliefs," that is, a set of "bedrock attitudes that govern all deliberate behavior and relationships and also all spontaneous responses to crises." These beliefs or affirmations are not "theological niceties or technical formulations," but deeply held convictions—"anchors in life's storms"—that (were and) are used for survival and that reflect "the yearnings of a stolen people to be free and whole under God." Acquired through life experiences, worship and cultural exposure, these beliefs are embraced intuitively and emotionally, many times passed down through stories and songs that offer messages of hope and comfort to the singer-storytellers as well as to their listeners.

Mitchell and Cooper Lewter highlight, identify and define ten such core beliefs and form their chapters around them. For example, the chapters on "The Providence of God," "The Omniscience of God," and "The Grace of God" describe the painful test of unconditional faith, the rites of passage to obtain that faith, and the implementation of that faith as a powerful belief system.

The authors philosophical insights are inspiring and they provide readers with useful tools for inner excavation and critical self-examination. The connection between the spiritual and religious is evident throughout the text. The chapter on "The Justice of God," for example, was exceedingly wonderful. It transported me.

In fact, I came the closest to resting in my grandmother's bosom, than I have since she died. I remembered her songs as she waited in the warmth of the kitchen for her biscuits to rise. I rested in the love and strength of her as she sang, "We've come this far by faith leaning on the Lord." I recalled how she'd break into a chorus of "the storm is passing over."

Mitchell and Lewter suggest that a lot more is passed on through songs and stories without the awareness of the initiate. (Such was my case.) They also suggest that individuals tend to select those songs that are meaningful, healing and spiritually significant to them. My grandmother strongly believed in what she was singing, and while in her arms and presence she passed this knowledge on to me.

Despite its focus, you don't have to be Black to appreciate *Soul Theology*. Its greatest asset is its pragmatism and utility, which transcends racial barriers and confirms my belief (and my grandmother's) that we are One. There is no doubt that the book—a good resource text for adult Sunday school classes, mental health professionals, spiritual directors and pastoral counselors, alike—has the potential for becoming a work of enduring value. Therefore it is with great satisfaction and pride that I endorse this book.

I also want to personally thank the authors for stimulating the reunion with my grandmother. I can still hear her say, "Don't worry precious, after the crucifixion, there is the resurrection, and O what joy!"

M. Muggy Do Dickinson is special assistant to the administrator, Mental Retardation/Development Disabilities Administration, Washington, D.C.

Stretching the Frontiers of Awareness

LUCID DREAMING

By Stephen LaBerge, Ph.D.

Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc.

Los Angeles, California, 1985

Reviewed by Charles T. Tart, Ph.D.

When we think of the world, we usually think of the physical world. Yet there are mental worlds of experience—worlds of dreams and inner imaginings, worlds accessible in altered states of consciousness. Conventional wisdom gives full reality only to the physical world, but we have to be careful as to how far we will let a convenient convention become an absolute that limits our minds. In a dream or altered

state, we are "out" of this world, as far as our immediate reality is concerned. Must we always dismiss such experiences as "subjective" and "unreal" when we return to ordinary reality?

Stephen LaBerge's pioneering work, reported in highly readable form in his book, *Lucid Dreaming*, establishes that lucid dreaming usually occurs in a stage one rapid eye movement (REM) state, the same physiological state that ordinary dreaming occurs in. This rules out the old idea that it was really impossible to be lucid in a dream, that people who thought they had lucid dreams were just vividly imagining things during brief awakenings in the night. His work also shows that lucid dreaming includes a clear recall and understanding of waking state experimental objectives and a capacity for volitional control of dream action in the laboratory, in accordance with these objectives.

To illustrate: A subject capable of having lucid dreams agrees that during such dreams he will signal the experimenter (who is monitoring his brainwaves, eye movements, and other physiological measures) that he is now lucid in his dream. This is not an easy task, given the general paralysis of almost all muscles in stage one sleep! How can it be done?

With rapid eye movements being measured, as well as electromyogram (tiny electrical signals that control muscular movement) potentials on both wrists, the dreamer, on becoming lucid, sends a prearranged signal. He rolls his (dream) eyes vertically three times. Pure vertical rapid eye movements are rare in stage one REM sleep, so are not likely to occur by chance.

Not likely is not impossible, though, so to be completely sure the lucidity signal really signifies lucidity, the dreamer then sends his initials in Morse code by selectively tensing the (dream) muscles of his (dream) hands. If the right hand is to signify dots and the left dashes, for example, LaBerge (a proficient lucid dreamer himself) would send his initials, S.L., by tensing his right hand thrice (S = dot, dot, dot in Morse), pausing a couple of seconds, and then tensing his right hand once, his left hand once, and his right hand twice (L = dot, dash, dot, dot in Morse). Electrodes on the dreamer's (physical) wrists pick up the electrical signals produced and record them on the polygraph. These kinds of signals of lucidity have now been sent many times in the laboratory. Keith Hearne, a British psychologist working totally independently of LaBerge, conducted similar successful experiments at about the same time.

Controlled lucidity is a major breakthrough for the scientific study of dreams. Understanding the nature of dreams has always been a slow process because of their uncontrollable, spontaneous nature. They seldom manifest the

particular thing you would like to observe more closely when you are ready to study it. LaBerge describes many experiments about the nature of dreams that are much more feasible with a dreamer who is an active co-experimenter. What rate does dream time flow at, for example?

Have a lucid dreamer signal lucidity, then count off an agreed upon number of seconds in the dream, then signal again. Now compare the polygraph marks signaling a dream time interval with clock time. It turns out that dream time flows at much the same rate as ordinary time, at least for short intervals.

The results of this and several other fascinating experiments in this vein are described in LaBerge's book, including studies of dream sexuality, right- and left-brain hemisphere functioning and dream consciousness. Many more are possible, yet this research is still in its infancy.

Growth Aspects

The most obvious possibility of lucid dreaming that strikes us is gratification of our desires: I can experience anything I want! Sex, power, magic, adventure, you name it. This is natural. Yet, as LaBerge recognizes,

...passions, desires, expectations, and goals with which we are so familiar, a point of satiation may be reached. Lucid dreamers...grow weary of dreaming

the same dream, and equally of being the same self, night after night. It is at this point that the need for self-transcendence may arise. Such lucid dreamers no longer know what they want, only that it is not what they used to want. So they give up deciding what to do, and resign from deliberate dream control.

Thus, there is the possibility of using lucid dreams for personal and spiritual growth. This is a very individualized subject, but a very real potential. Consider the following lucid dream of LaBerge's:

While ascending a mountain path, I began to find it more and more difficult to climb. My legs took on the familiar leaden feeling they sometimes have in dreams, and a dull heaviness spread through my rapidly weakening body. My feelings of weariness deepened relentlessly until I could only continue by crawling—but finally even this was too much for me and I was overcome with the feeling of certainty that I was about to die of exhaustion. The realization of imminent death focused my attention with remarkable clarity upon what I wanted to express with the one

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from preceding page

act of my life I had left: perfect acceptance. Thus, gladly embracing death, I let go completely of my last breath, when to my amazement and delight, a rainbow flowed out of my heart and I awoke from the dream.

Years after his experience, the profound impact of this dream of death and transcendence continue to influence my beliefs concerning what may happen to us when we die...

We Westerners are a long way from a fully developed discipline of spiritual growth through lucid dreaming (Tibetan Buddhism has such a discipline), but LaBerge gives us some interesting starting points. His book also has techniques he developed for inducing lucid dreaming. All in all, the book will stretch your mind in some very interesting ways.

Charles T. Tart, Ph.D., is a noted author, researcher, lecturer and teacher in the area of consciousness. This review is adapted from an article which appeared in the Winter 1986 issue of the *The Open Mind*, a newsletter published by Tart. For more information on this newsletter and schedule of seminars and workshops led by Dr. Tart, write: The Open Mind, PO Box 37, El Cerrito, CA 94530.

Book Briefs

What a wonderfully exciting season for bibliophiles!

Shambhala, for example, has a powerful lineup of books, some hot off the press, others soon to be published. The real gems in Shambhala's crown this Spring and Summer are decidedly Jungian. **Marie-Louise von Franz's** book, *On Dreams and Death*, is a superior addition to the literature. Originally published in 1984 in Munich, Germany, the book is a compelling study of what the unconscious has to say about death through the medium of dreams. Working in this area has convinced the pre-eminent analyst and author that the "... dreams of people who are facing death indicate that the

unconscious, our instinct world, prepare consciousness *not for a definite end, but for a profound transformation* [italics mine] and for a kind of continuation of the life process which, however, is unimaginable to everyday consciousness." Examples of dreams and their interpretation are the lifeblood of this fascinating and thought-provoking work. Look for a full-length review in the September-October issue of *Common Boundary*... Jungian analyst **Linda Schierse Leonard** whose book, *The Wounded Woman*, reached the 100,000 copies-in-print mark, has a new book entitled, *On the Way to the Wedding: Transforming the Love Relationship*. Using stories about love and marriage—from classic fairy tales like Beauty and the Beast to contemporary fiction like Hemingway's *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* and the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, Leonard illustrates psychological barriers men and women need to overcome to form committed relationships and looks at the meaning of traditional rituals such as the exchanging of vow and rings at the wedding ceremony... Also from Shambhala and scheduled for an August release is *Transformations of Consciousness: Conventional and Contemplative Perspectives in Development* by **Ken Wilber, Jack Engler** and **Daniel Brown**. The book evolved from articles many of which first appeared in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*. A collection of these pieces, the book focuses on Wilber's work with a "full spectrum model" of human growth and development and others' work with comparing and contrasting the value of traditional psychological techniques with contemplative and meditative disciplines. Included, for examples, are reports on Rorschach studies of advanced meditators...

Coming out this fall from Shambhala is **Charles Tart's** new book, *Waking Up: Overcoming the Obstacles to Human Potential*. Dr. Tart explained that the book "is based heavily on Gurdjieff's ideas, but is done in modern psychological language with many expansions so [as to]... make these ideas more useful and accessible... Also this fall look for a sequel to **Frances Vaughan** and **Roger Walsh's** edited volume, *Accept This Gift*, inspiring excerpts from *A Course in Miracles*. The new book will be entitled *The Gift of Peace*... Harper and Row has released **Bernie Siegel's** book, *Love, Medicine and Miracles*. The book is highly readable and inspiring book that is simple, straight-forward, eminently practical and wonderfully anecdotal. Although Siegel writes from his perspective as a physician and surgeon, the experiences he relates are applicable and useful to anyone involved in a healing process, personally or professionally... Lastly, it is interesting to note how books by channeled entities are increasing in number. Up to now, most—like *A Course in Miracles*, *Ramtha*, *Guide Lectures for Self-Transformation*, etc.—were published and distributed by individuals or organizations. *Emmanuel's Book*, compiled by **Pat Rodegast** and **Judith Stanton** and highly recommended by **Ram Dass** who wrote the introduction, also began that way. Recently, however, Bantam Books acquired the rights to the book. While no date has been set for the Bantam edition (Staff say it could take up to six months.), copies are still available through Friends Press (See the Discount Book Service). Bantam's involvement will definitely widen the audience for *Emmanuel's Book* and probably open the door for others in the same genre.

ADDICTIONS AND CONSCIOUSNESS NEWSLETTER

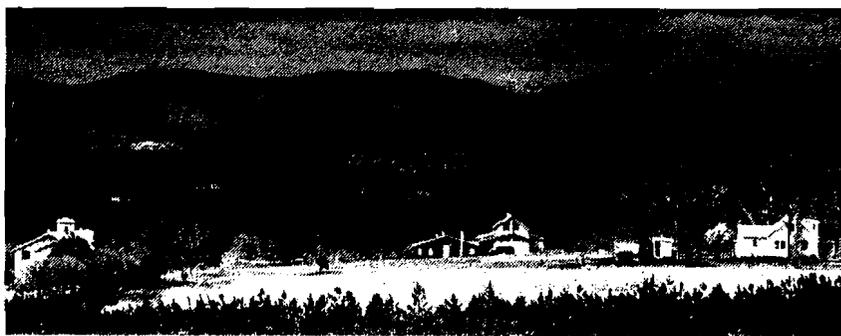
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