

## *Introduction*

*“Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.”*

CHIEF SEATTLE

THE CONCEPT OF THE TRIBAL OR COMMUNAL FIELD FIRST emerged into my consciousness from my initial analysis out of my own dreams. The whisperings and soft hints were all around me, but it has taken years of observations and curiosities to discover a workable model for this almost-ignored layer of the psyche. The communal field is, simply put, the intersection of psyches in the unconscious. It is where we meet—and overlap and interconnect and affect—each other’s realities and life path. It is relationship. It is, in classical Jungian terms, referred to as the *objective* level of dreaming, where exterior objective (“real”) data manifests in the dream world. The objective approach to the meaning of dreams is in contrast to the ubiquitous, highly symbolic, *subjective* approach to dream images—where all aspects and figures in dreams are understood to be *parts of the dreamer*.

Jung was well aware of this less common, communal, tribal type of dreaming, even if he didn’t point to it specifically. One early example is the “compensatory dream” to which Jung referred frequently in his writings. In *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*,

Jung related how he first began to discover this type of dream. The theory of compensation in dreams became a cornerstone of Jungian psychology where the unconscious dream image balances or compensates the conscious ego attitude. Like the scales of justice, the dream maker presents the “other side” of our many one-sided attitudes. Jung dreamed about a woman he had in analysis who “aroused [his] doubts” (Jung 1973, 133). Although he had begun to find their work together shallow and unproductive, in Jung’s dream his patient appeared in a castle high on a hill, and in order to see her he had to “bend his head way back.” He even awakened with a crick in his neck. From this he realized he had undervalued her and his dream was *correcting* his one-sided attitude. He did not interpret or understand his dream as only parts of himself, that the woman portrayed an aspect of feminine nature, his anima, that he was removed from and so on. Rather, Jung saw the dream as real objective information that was about the relationship between him and her, and he realized how his attitude had adversely affected his treatment. After his dream, the analysis improved. In general, compensatory dreams that confront our one-sidedness can facilitate outer change. We do not live and dream in separate hermetically sealed cells but are woven together in an intricate pattern of relationships.

Jung taught in more detail about the dilemma of the objective or subjective interpretation of dreams in a dream analysis seminar that he conducted in 1928–1930 (Bollingen Series, 1984). In the following quote, Jung addressed the important issue of interpreting the dreams of married persons (and others in close relationships) because the spouse who appears in such dreams often represents him / herself rather than simply portrays the part of the dreamer (also referred to as a *projection*):

We came here to a most important consideration: the fact that when one is analyzing married people, or people

who are in very close relationship even if it is not marriage, then one simply cannot deal with their psychology as a separate factor; it is as if one were dealing with two people, and it is exceedingly difficult to disentangle the individual belongings from the relationship. One finds invariably that the so-called individual psychology of such a case is only explicable under the assumption that another human being is functioning in that mind at the same time; in other words it is relationship psychology and not the psychology of an isolated human individual. [. . .] It is even very difficult to isolate the individual parts from the related parts. So we can hardly consider such a dream as his own property; it would be his wife's just as much. His psychology is in her as hers in him, and every dream that each one has is more or less an expression of that relatedness. . . . (Jung, *Dream Analysis*, 559)

Jung goes on to say that “[s]uch a dream is only understandable when you take it as the expression of a relationship. It is as if he and his wife had come together in the night and concocted a dream, issuing a statement that was equally true for either side” (560). And, finally, Jung makes the following impassioned statement that encapsulates the thesis of my book: “. . . according to my experience a vast majority of the dreams of married people are of this kind.<sup>1</sup> Also, of course, people who are not married but who are related to somebody. Or even if they are not closely related to anybody, they are still interpenetrated by external factors.” (561).

Relational, tribal, communal dreaming is precisely what this book is about—it is dreaming that arises from and speaks through what I term the “tribal field” or “communal field.” It is where dreams inform the psyche about our relationships, not merely about parts of ourselves (although that approach to the material is almost always informative and helpful, as well). But it simply

does not encompass the whole picture, just as one would not want to look at a great painting with pieces blocked from view. Besides seeing dreams as factually corrective in relationships, when one looks at dreams from a tribal view they take on a host of meanings and indications. Most of these clues about our unconscious tribal psyche arise in dream groups. Some emerge even in one-on-one analysis. The experiences that most reveal the complex intersections of our dream time often involve synchronicity.

### BLACK ELK AND THE LAKOTA DREAM-FIELD

I owe the Lakota a great debt for this work because without the brave elders' willingness to tell their stories to biographers, none of this may have come into my consciousness. I feel certain I would not have realized the importance and power of the dream-group experiment. The Lakota people knew their dreams and visions were meant for the entire tribe, not just for individuals. They also were aware that dreams hold important literal information about events and relationships, as well as the sacred realm. In fact, in their belief system, if one kept silent about an important vision, one would become ill or even die because the vision was meant to be a gift to the community. There are numerous examples of people following and not following the spiritual urgings from their visionary process, but perhaps the single most poignant example with which I am familiar is Black Elk's.

I vividly recall reading *Black Elk Speaks* as I lunched by myself at Little Shanghai restaurant in Denver sometime in 1980. As I read Black Elk's words, I was seized by such a powerful emotion that I broke down and started crying. It was unusual for me to cry then—even in sad movies—but there I sat, sobbing, shaking, and acutely aware I was making the waitress and myself highly uncomfortable. And yet, I couldn't seem to help it. I couldn't read Black Elk's story of the Horse Dance without my feelings coming

to a crescendo. The climax of his long suffering, which resulted in his people honoring him with a three-day ceremony that became a permanent part of the Lakota tradition, moved me to tears. Young Black Elk, alone with the power of his remarkable vision, was perplexed and dismayed by what he had experienced. At the early age of nine he had been in a state of visionary grace that lasted days. His parents thought he was going to die, but finally he came back into his body and back to consciousness. Afterward, he felt tormented, depressed, even mentally unbalanced. To a much lesser degree I identified with his depression, confusion, and lack of purpose. I too had experienced deep personal self-doubt about my sanity, my value, and my worth as a person. I had not experienced Black Elk's vision or anything like it, but I knew the same feelings of alienation and aloneness. Unlike me, however, Black Elk (dismal as his history is in its full context) had a supportive community to help him bring his vision into the world. He had friends, relatives, teachers, and mentors who devoted three days in complex preparations and time-consuming activities to pay homage to the gift Black Elk and all of his people had received. For several years Black Elk had held his vision inside, close to his breast where it only tormented and troubled him. But when he finally shared his vision with a teacher, it was received so gently, so respectfully and kindly, that his life's purpose became clear. His doubt slipped away, and his spirit was lifted. As I read and wept, I knew neither I nor anyone else I knew had the community to support such a vision. I knew the church declared visions heretical, psychiatry declared them pathological, and regular folks usually just shook their heads and said, "weird." All of this disparagement had kept me closed off—until I entered Jungian analysis. But even Jungian analysis, with its healing emphasis on dreams and inner soul life, cannot substitute for living in a tribal community where the presence of the sacred is part of the culture, where visions are enacted and honored, and where discovering the meaning of dreams is a daily occurrence.

Unfortunately, to buy (once or more each week) the time of a professional, someone to whom we tell our secrets, our hopes, our sufferings—someone who by law is emotionally and relationally distant—is not the same experience as having a tribal elder stay up all night to learn the songs one has been given in a vision. So I was saddened—for myself by what is not present in my culture, and for Black Elk and other native people whose magnificent customs have been lost due to oppression from the larger people and culture. Even then I wondered if there might be a way for a community to honor a person's dream or vision without the process turning cult-like or psychologically dangerous.

In my analysis that began in 1979 I became acquainted with other people who were also in analysis with the same analyst. We met at classes and parties and became a community of sorts. Before long, a great deal of discussion about our dreams, our analysis, and our analyst ensued, and we formed a tight-knit group. We spent many evenings and weekends in activities designed to manifest the unconscious. Through no fault of the analyst, I then became involved with a few of these people in what I can only describe as a difficult and even dangerous boundary invasion. The friendships all blew up and the close times seemed to be over. It was a frightening and confusing experience. Consequently, from the experience of letting people participate in my analytical inner life and from seeing the negative effects it could have, I developed a cautious style as an analyst candidate and later as an analyst. I did not encourage starvation vision quests, ritual bloodletting, or drug-induced initiations that some colleagues of mine seemed to invite. Tossing people into contact with the unconscious was not a favorite emphasis of mine. Rather, I focused on how to process one's ever-present, rich, unconscious material that, to me, seemed ever-apparent and accessible in the psyche. Having the vision is not the trick, it is what the vision means and how it changes one's life that is the more significant issue. The un-

conscious venue is quite seductive, and one can easily be inflated by the magic and mystery of the manifestations that come forth so easily. The earnest seeker knows his/her experiences are not the end—they are only a window or clue to greater consciousness and understanding.

Unfortunately, modern culture, as I have experienced it, does not provide a place or space to understand, honor, process, and digest this rich unconscious matter. In fact, it seems to deny it, label it, and condemn it over time. This is why Black Elk's community touched me so deeply. Here a connected tribal culture was well able to integrate the young Black Elk's vision into its collective religious mythos.

What also made a profound impression on me was how dreams and visions were experienced as tribal phenomena and not solely as an individual event. I found examples in the written accounts where one person's dream would be understood as a message to someone else, and instances in which a dream could be seen as crucial for the tribe's survival. I read about a person's name being changed because of someone else's dream, a ceremony altered or adjusted because of a person's vision, two people dreaming of each other on the same night being initiated in the "twin dreamer" lodge, or a community forming around people who dreamed of the same animal.

Imagine you are a Lakota, about twelve years old, awakening one morning with a stirring dream. You tell your father you dreamed the night before of being a wolf. You were in the forest, on all fours, and when you looked down at yourself you were surprised to see your furry legs and paws instead of hands and feet. You experienced fully being a wolf, the heightened sense of smell, of hearing. Never before had you dreamed like this. Your father is reserved, but you can see he is pleased. He sends the tribal messenger to tell every teepee that his child has had a great wolf dream. Then he selects the finest of your family's horses and leads

it into camp, announcing a give-away. Then your grandmother appears with one of her best deerskins, tanned and soft as velvet, to add to the horse-gift. Next, a group of elders comes to your teepee to fetch you for a special meeting—and you realize they are all wolf dreamers and members of the wolf lodge. You gather together, and they listen intently while you repeat your dream in detail. They ask questions. They desire to know every aspect of your dream—did you receive a song, a message, an object? Your dream and all the information contained in it is memorized and thoughtfully pondered. Then, in a secret ceremony that you never reveal to anyone who is not a wolf dreamer, you are initiated into this lodge of which you will remain a member until you die.

It seems clear that the Lakota's approach to their interior soul was vastly different from Western-European religious attitudes, as well as from the modern psychological approach to dream material. The Lakota people already knew, in their own way, about Carl Jung's discovery of the collective unconscious—and perhaps they understood it at a more significant level.

Jung asserts there is a personal and a collective unconscious. To state it briefly, the “personal unconscious” contains a repository of our memories, wishes, fantasies, and personal experiences—it is uniquely an individual's own material. Additionally, Jung rightly noted the existence of a “collective unconscious”—the field of inner archetypal existence where psyches encounter the common ground of reality. His theory explains why there are vast similarities in disconnected cultures regarding their art, myths, religious beliefs, and so on.<sup>2</sup>

But what Jung wrote less about is the space in the middle—the territory that lies between the personal and the collective unconscious. This is the field of psychic reality the Lakota knew well. It is the place where relationship affects the unconscious. It also involves a precognitive dimension (to know ahead of time) that is baffling to the ego that we Jungians call synchronicity. It

contains material about “we” rather than “I” or “one.” It is the communal level of the unconscious, or, in other words, the place where two psyches, or groups of psyches, intersect in a colorful complex tapestry.<sup>3</sup>

The tribal field clarified itself when I began my analytical practice as a candidate to become a Jungian analyst. Right away, I noticed oddities that other therapists and analysts I talked to said they experienced as well; for example, the embarrassing way my clients would mirror issues I was currently working on. Again and again people would begin therapy or analysis with me only to outline my own process in the first session. Issues that were not public knowledge, some very fresh, would land in my office. I noticed, too, how similar certain sessions were over a day or a period of days. Peculiar synchronicities would occur from one session to the next without clients’ knowledge. I might hear three very similar dreams in three different sessions over the course of a day or an issue like a mother’s birthday gift might be mentioned several times in a week. Only recently I heard the image “amphitheatre” mentioned in analysis or in dream images four times in one week. One week seven of my clients traveled to New York City for holidays in the same week of October. Currently I am seeing three terminally ill clients, all of whom had begun seeing me long before the illness or prognosis was known. Other oddities occurred, as well. I noticed my clients would wear similar clothing on a given day, or sometimes I would be dressed almost identically to one or two of them. Then, other synchronicities occurred. I ran into clients in unexpected places, and some had connections to people in my past from another part of the country, connections that defied rational explanation; others would bring a dream in that I had had myself that morning.

My thoughts returned to the Lakota people. They lived a tribal life. They shared diet, customs, geography, religious beliefs, daily activities, a gene pool. They dressed alike, lived in similar

structures, participated in similar daily activities and religious rituals. I cannot imagine what tribal life would be like, but when I think about it I sense a longing in myself. I have an instinctive feeling that alienation and much modern “loss of soul” would diminish. Human beings couple, form family groups, extended family groups, and tribes or clans. In modern life our tribal connection is severed. An entire development of human social behavior has been lost to modern civilization.

In the modern and postmodern era we have lost connection to the tribal life we social beings have operated within since antiquity. The ring of relationships, including initiators, mentors, teachers, shamans, spiritual advisors, and dream interpreters, was once contained within the tribal social structure. This layer of relationship does not exist in the same sense in modern times, but it still resides within the psyche and within our souls. It is the area where we intersect in dreams, where our psyches meet and interact in the most powerful ways. It is the archetypal realm of connection that includes love, hate, war, and procreation. We are modern men and women in search of a soul that is nearly impossible to discover because we have lost a significant and essential layer of our social structure. According to anthropological studies in Ireland, Africa, North and South America, as well as all over the world, tribes and clans have been a part of human social development for most of human history (about two million years) and hominid history (five million years). Tribal life is also evidenced in the mammalian world. Thus, one can surmise that the tribal existence is very old in our brains. In our modern era, however, all of this is lost. We don't speak the same language, come from the same gene pool, wear the same clothing, have history together, travel together, live in community together. Within the tribal life of antiquity, one could find his first teacher, learn his first medicine songs, learn to hunt, bead, sew, weave, plant, and seek

the inner spirit's voice. This type of social support is only recently lacking in the modern age. It is missing now even though humans lived with it for thousands of years. Currently we are scattered and dissipated into fragments, short relationships, fractured encounters, piecemeal connections. But the dream world does not know we have given up tribal life. Our psyches still operate in the old way; the authors of our dreams pick characters from our connecting tribe to use in our nighttime dramas, which inform us about ourselves, about the persons in whom we dream, and about our relationships.

Analysis, it seems, is an individual container, and is not to be tampered with by the messy stuff of relationships. However, this individualistic attitude is challenged by the Lakota approach to dreams, because, as I have been arguing, many dreams are meant for the whole tribe, or are at least important for all the characters in the dream, regardless of who dreamed it. I asked myself how something, anything, could be provided for people to create a safe, grounded, yet deep enough process for a community vision to manifest? Dream groups came to mind. I had seen various types of groups throughout my graduate school and Zurich educations. I had seen how powerful and bonding they could be. I knew they were potentially dangerous, too. But my thoughts returned to the Lakota. Could people together bring their dreams to a group setting and find support as well as illumination? Could one person's dream impact another's? Would dreams about each other be relational information or would we be stuck in the subjective interpretation box where all characters in dreams are parts of the dreamer? Would we have the courage, and did I have the skill, to take people into a psychological and spiritual place that would manifest healing and understanding? I didn't know, but I wanted to try.

What follows are the stories and tales of forming dream

groups, their failures and successes, the questions and perhaps some answers they bring to the analytical table. I have also included tribal, synchronistic, and relational stories from my individual cases in this discussion. My hope is that the mystery of our meaning to each other, for each other, among each other, can be, ever so slightly, illuminated here.